NOVEMBER

# Weird Tales

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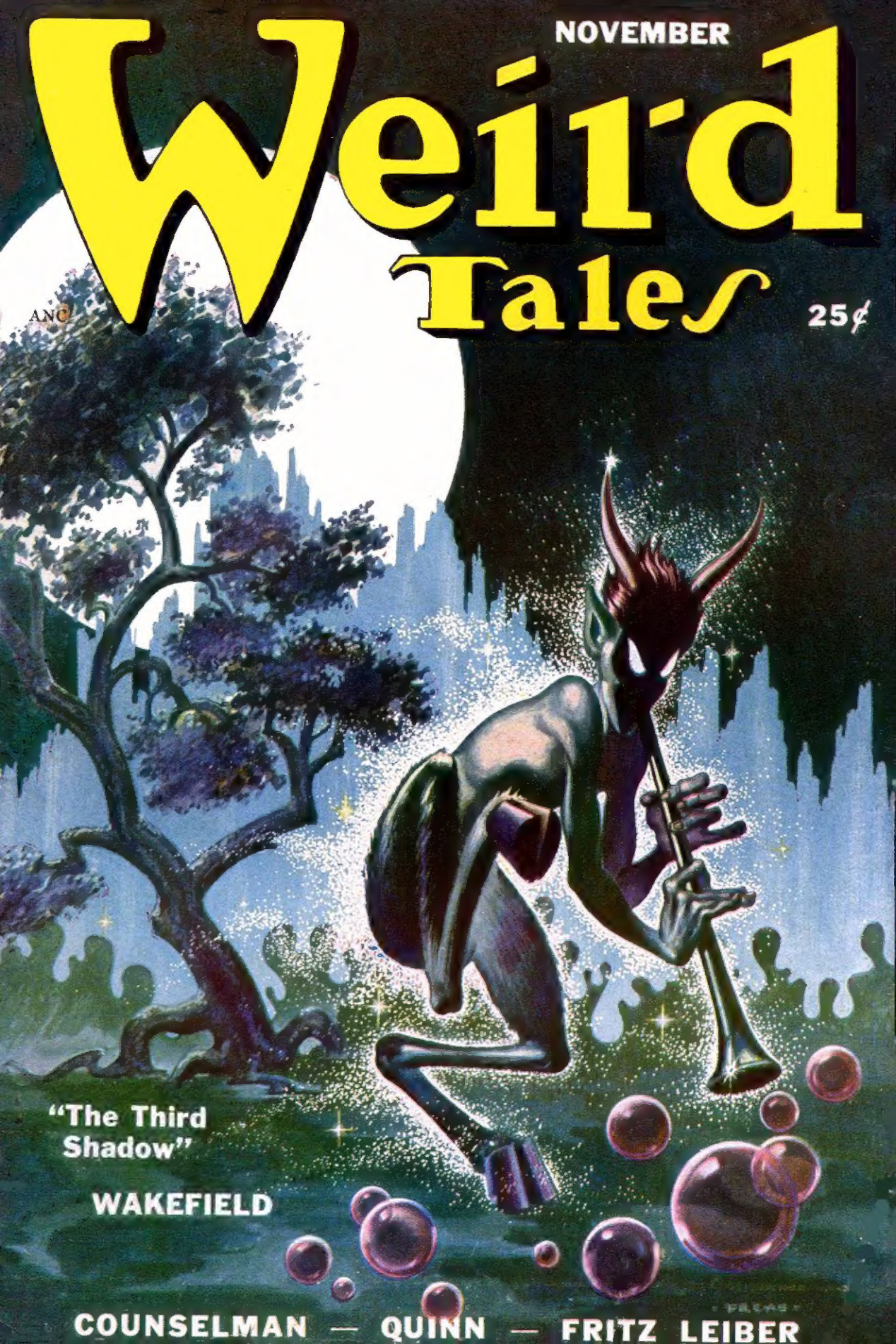

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# Weird Tales

ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

NOVEMBER, 1950 Cover by Frank Kelly Freas


*NOVELETTE*


THE DEAD MAN . . . . . Fritz Leiber, Jr. 8

*One could fairly see the tabloids playing up a story about "the doctor who ordered a man to die."*


*SHORT STORIES*


THE THIRD SHADOW . . . . . H. Russell Wakefield 24

*Roped together were two mountaineers on the treacherous cone—but three shadows on the snow.*

THE BODY-SNATCHERS . . . . . Seabury Quinn 33

*" 'Jules de Grandin,' I ask me, 'are it not odd that a man and a woman should have the same delusions, and at approximately the same time?' "*

GROTESQUERIE . . . . . Harold Lawlor 47

*. . . the inmates of the house scuttled away in the purposely kept dimly lighted halls; the latest comer was never seen about at all.*

SOMETHING OLD . . . . . Mary Elizabeth Counselman 59

*"Something Borrowed and Something Blue . . ." so the old Babylonian ring was on Celia's finger on her wedding day. A ring with a secret compartment.*

THE INVISIBLE REWEAVER . . . . . Margaret St. Clair 70

*So many fatal accidents couldn't be just chance; one man certainly had a fantastic theory that covered them.*

BLUE PETER . . . . . Murray Sanford 76

*"A year an' a day the curse will haunt ye, and your own words will bring you ruin!"*

THEY WORKED THE ORACLE . . . . . H. S. W. Chibbett 82

*Black Markets weren't due to be thought of for thousands of years, and Hades hadn't sunk that low as yet.*


*VERSE*


THE HAUNTED . . . . . Stanton A. Coblentz 46

THE EYRIE . . . . . 6

WEIRDISMS . . . . . Lee Brown Coye 69

WEIRD CROSSWORD . . . . . 75



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173

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D. McILWRAITH, *Editor*

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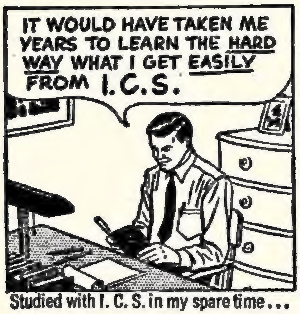
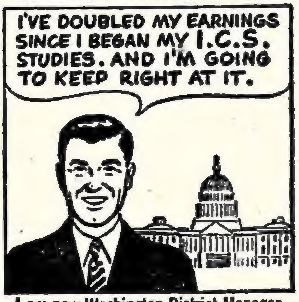



Studied with I. C. S. in my spare time . . .

I. C. S. sent reports to my employer . . .

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The Editor, WEIRD TALES
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*The latest issue of* WEIRD TALES *was pretty good. I'm glad you've got a letter column again, but it would be much better if expanded, and if we readers were allowed to discuss the stories. The authors survive severe criticism in the other mags without any appreciable increase of suicide in their ranks, and I think they could stand a little from this corner as well. Yours is the only magazine on the market featuring weird stuff, and the only place where we can compare the present masters of the art with the greats of the past. Also, if you printed somewhat longer letters we could make them more interesting and intelligent.*

*As to story material, I hope you will strike a judicious balance between the extremes of all Stf and all weird, with somewhat more emphasis on the latter. Any chance of getting some Cthulthu stories from Derleth, Bloch, Long, or C. A. Smith? And how about some nice moody stuff from Wandrei, or is that too much to hope for?*

*Seymour Sargent*
*R. F. D. 10*
*Penacook, N. H.*

Certainly we think the Eyrie should have letters of discussion and criticism, and welcome them very heartily. What we don't find interesting is endless tabulations. As for Mr. Sargent's point about longer letters being "more interesting and intelligent," we aren't sure. It is by no means always true

(*Continued on page* 93)

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*The sort of man about whom one might say he'd make a nasty ghost.*

# The Dead Man

by Fritz Leiber Jr.

Heading by Charles A. Kennedy

PROFESSOR MAX REDFORD opened the frosted glass door of the reception room and beckoned to me. I followed him eagerly. When the most newsworthy doctor at one of America's foremost medical schools phones a popular-science writer and asks him to drop over, but won't tell him why, there is cause for excitement. Especially when that doctor's researches, though always well-founded, have tended towards the sensational. I remembered the rabbits so allergic to light that an open shade raised blisters on their shaved skins, the hypnotized heart patient whose blood-pressure slowly changed, the mold that fed on blood clots in a living animal's brain. Fully half my best articles with a medical slant came from Max. We had been rather close friends for several years.

As we hurried along the hushed corridor, he suddenly asked me, "What is death?"

That wasn't the sort of question I was expecting. I gave him a quick look. His bullet-shaped head, with its shock of close-cropped grizzled hair, was hunched forward. The eyes behind the thick lenses were bright, almost mischievous. He was smiling.

I shrugged.

"I have something to show you," he said.

"What, Max?"

"You'll see."

"A story?"

He shook his head. "At present I don't want a word released to the public or the profession."

"But some day—?" I suggested.

"Maybe one of the biggest."

We entered his office. On the examination table lay a man, the lower half of his body covered by a white sheet. He seemed to be asleep.

Right there I got a shock. For although I hadn't the faintest idea who the man was, I did recognize him. I was certain that I

had seen that handsome face once before —through the French windows of the living room of Max's home, some weeks ago. It had been pressed passionately to the face of Velda, Max's attractive young wife, and those arms had been cradling her back. Max and I had just arrived at his lonely suburban place after a long evening session at the laboratory, and he had been locking the car when I glanced through the window. When we had got inside, the man had been gone, and Max had greeted Velda with his usual tenderness. I had been bothered by the incident, but of course there had been nothing I could do about it.

I turned from the examination table, trying to hide my surprise. Max sat down at his desk and began to rap on it with a pencil. Nervous excitement, I supposed.

From the man on the examination table, now behind me, came a dry, hacking cough.

"Take a look at him," said Max, "and tell me what disease he's suffering from."

"I'm no doctor," I protested.

"I know that, but there are some symptoms that should have an obvious meaning even to a layman."

"But I didn't even notice he was ill," I said.

Max goggled his eyes at me, "You didn't?"

Shrugging my shoulders, I turned—and wondered how in the world I could have missed it at the first glance. I supposed I had been so flustered at recognizing the man that I hadn't noticed anything about him—I had been seeing the memory image more than the actual person. For Max was right. Anyone could have hazarded a diagnosis of this case. The general pallor, the hectic spots of color over the cheek bones, the emaciated wrists, the prominent ribs, the deep depressions around the collar bones, and above all the continued racking cough that even as I watched brought a bit of blood specked mucous to the lips —all pointed at an advanced stage of chronic tuberculosis. I told Max so.

Max stared at me thoughtfully, rapping again on the table. I wondered if he sensed what I was trying to hide from him. Certainly I felt very uncomfortable. The presence of that man, presumably Velda's lover, in Max's office, unconscious and suffering from a deadly disease, and Max so sardonic-seeming and full of suppressed excitement, and then that queer question he had asked me about death—taken all together, they made a peculiarly nasty picture.

What Max said next didn't help either.

"You're quite sure it's tuberculosis?"

"Naturally I could be wrong," I admitted uneasily. "It might be some other disease with the same symptoms or—" I had been about to to say, "or the effects of some poison," but I checked myself. "But the symptoms are there, unmistakably," I finished.

"You're positive?" He seemed to enjoy drawing it out.

"Of course!"

He smiled. "Take another look."

"I don't need to," I protested. For the first time in our relationship I was wondering if there wasn't something extremely unpleasant about Max.

"Take one, just the same."

Unwillingly I turned—and for several moments there was room in my mind for nothing but astonishment.

"What kind of trick is this?" I finally asked Max, shakily.

FOR the man on the examination table had changed. Unmistakably the same man, though for a moment I questioned even that, for now instead of the cadaverous spectre of tuberculosis, a totally different picture presented itself. The wrists, so thin a minute ago, were now swollen, the chest had become so unhealthily puffy that the ribs and collar bones were lost to view, the skin had a bluish tinge, and from between the sagging lips came a labored, wheezy breathing.

I still had a sense of horror, but now it was overlaid with an emotion that can be even stronger, an emotion that can outweigh all considerations of human personality and morals: the excitement of scientific discovery. Whoever this man was, whatever Max's motives might be, whatever unsuspected strain of evil there might

exist deep in his nature, he had *hit* on something here, something revolutionary. I didn't know what it was, but my heart pounded and little chills of excitement chased over my skin.

Max refused to answer any of the questions I bombarded him with. All he would do was sit back and smile at me and say, "And now, after your second look, what do you think's wrong with him?"

He finally badgered me into making a statement.

"Well of course there's something fishy about it, but if you insist, here's my idea: Heart disease, perhaps caused by kidney trouble. In any case, something badly out of order with his pump."

Max's smile was infuriatingly bland. Again he rapped with his pencil, like some supercilious teacher.

"You're sure of that?" he prodded.

"Just as sure as I was the first time that it was tuberculosis."

"Well, take another look . . . and meet John Fearing."

I turned, and almost before I realized it, my hand had been firmly clasped and was being vigorously shaken by that of one of the finest physical specimens I have ever seen. I remember thinking dazedly, "Yes, he's as incredibly handsome and beautifully built as he seemed to me when I glimpsed him kissing Velda. And along with it a strange sort of smoothness, like you felt in Rudolf Valentino. No wonder a woman might find him irresistible."

"I could have introduced you to John long ago," Max was saying. "He lives right near us, with his mother, and often drops over. But, well . . ." he chuckled, ". . . I've been a little jealous about John. I haven't introduced him to anyone connected with the profession. I've wanted to keep him to myself until we got a little further along with our experiments.

"And, John," Max went on, "this is Fred Alexander, the writer. He's one science popularizer who never strays a hairsbreadth into sensationalism and who takes infinite pains to make his reporting accurate. We can trust him not to breathe a word about our experiments until we tell him to. I've been thinking for some time now that we ought to let a third person in on our work, and I didn't want it to be a scientist or yet an ordinary layman. Fred here struck me as having just the right sort of general knowledge and sympathetic approach. So I rang him up—and I believe we've succeeded in giving him quite a surprise."

"You certainly have," I agreed fervently.

JOHN FEARING dropped my hand and stepped back. I was still running my eyes over his marvellously proportioned, athletic body. I couldn't spot a trace of the symptoms of the two dreadful diseases that had seemed to be wracking it minutes ago, or of any other sort of ill health. As he stood there so coolly, with the sheet loosely caught around his waist and falling in easy folds, it seemed to me that he might well be the model for one of the great classical Greek statues. His eyes had something of the same tranquil, ox-like, "all-body" look.

Turning towards Max, I was conscious of a minor shock. I had never thought of Max as ugly. If I'd ever thought of him at all in regard to looks, it had been as a man rather youthful for his middle age, stalwart, and with pleasingly rugged features.

Now, compared to Fearing, Max seemed a humped and dark-browed dwarf.

But this feeling of mine was immediately swallowed up in my excited curiosity.

Fearing looked at Max. "What diseases did I do this time," he asked casually.

"Tuberculosis and nephritis," Max told him. They both acted pleased. In fact, mutual trust and affection showed so plainly in their manner toward each other that I was inclined to dismiss my suspicions of some sinister underlying hatred.

After all, I told myself, the embrace I had witnessed might have been merely momentary physical intoxication on the part of the two young and lovely people, if it had been even that much. Certainly what Max had said about his desire to keep Fearing a secret from his friends and colleagues might very well explain why Fear-

ing had disappeared that night. On the other hand, if a deeper and less fleeting feeling did exist between Max's pretty wife and protege, Max might very well be aware of it and inclined to condone it. I knew him to be a remarkably tolerant man in some respects. In any case, I had probably exaggerated the importance of the matter.

And I certainly didn't want any such speculations distracting my thoughts now, when I was bending all my mental efforts to comprehend the amazing experiment that had just been conducted before my eyes.

Suddenly I got a glimmer of part of it.

"Hypnotism?" I asked Max.

He nodded, beaming.

"And the pencil-rappings were 'cues'? I mean, signals for him to carry out instructions given to him in an earlier stage of the trance?"

"That's right."

"I seem to recall now," I said, "that the raps were different in each case. I suppose each combination of raps was hooked up with a special set of instructions you'd given him."

"Exactly," said Max. "John won't respond until he gets the right signal. It seems a rather complicated way of going about it, but it isn't really. You know how a sergeant will give his men a set of orders and then bark out 'March!'? Well, the raps are John's marching signals. It works out better than giving him the instructions at the same time he's supposed to be carrying them out. Besides," and he looked at me roguishly, "it's a lot more dramatic."

"I'll say it is!" I assured him. "Max, let's get to the important point. How in the world did John fake those symptoms?"

Max raised his hands. "I'll explain everything. I didn't call you in just to mystify you. Sit down."

I hurriedly complied. Fearing effortlessly lifted himself onto the edge of the examination table and sat there placidly attentive, forearms loosely dropped along his thighs.

"As you know," Max began, "It's a well-established fact that the human mind can create all sorts of tangible symptoms of disease, without the disease itself being present in any way. Statistics show that about half the people who consult doctors are suffering from such imaginary ailments."

"Yes," I protested, "but the symptoms are never so extreme, or created with such swiftness. Why, there was even blood in the mucous. And those swollen wrists—"

Again Max raised his hands. "The difference is only one of degree. Please hear me out."

"Now John here," he continued, "is a very well adjusted, healthy-minded person, but a few years ago he was anything but that." He looked at Fearing, who nodded his agreement. "No, our John was a regular bad boy of the hospitals. Rather, his subconscious mind was, for of course there is no question of faking in these matters, the individual sincerely believes that he is sick. At all events, our John seemed to go through an unbelievable series of dangerous illnesses that frightened his mother to distraction and baffled his doctors, until it was realized that the illnesses were of emotional origin. That discovery wasn't made for a long time because of the very reason you mentioned—the unusual severity of the symptoms.

"However in the end it was the extraordinary power of John's subconscious to fake symptoms that gave the show away. It began to fake the symptoms of too many diseases, the onsets and recoveries were too fast, it jumped around too much. And then it made the mistake of faking the symptoms of germ diseases, when laboratory tests showed that the germs in question weren't present.

"The truth having been recognized, John was put in the hands of a competent psychiatrist, who eventually succeeded in straightening out the personality difficulties that had caused him to seek refuge in sickness. They turned out to be quite simple ones—an overprotective and emotionally demanding mother and a jealous and unaffectionate father, whose death a few years back had burdened John with guilt feelings.

"It was at that time—just after the brilliant success of the psychiatrist's treatment—that I ran across the case. It happened through Velda. She became friends with the Fearings, mother and son, when they moved into our neighborhood, and she visited with them a lot."

As he said that, I couldn't resist shooting a quick glance at Fearing, but I couldn't see any signs of uneasiness or smugness. I felt rather abashed.

"One evening when John was over at our place, he mentioned his amazing history of imaginary illnesses, and pretty soon I wormed the whole story out of him. I was immediately struck with something about his case that the other doctors had missed. Or if they had noticed it, they hadn't seen the implications—or the possibilities.

"Here was a person whose body was fantastically obedient to the dictates of his subconscious mind. All people are to some degree psychosomatic, to give it its technical name—you know, *psyche* and *soma*, mind and body. But our John was psychosomatic to a vastly greater degree. One in a million. Perhaps unique.

"Very likely some rare hereditary strain was responsible for this. I don't believe John will be angry with me if I tell you that his mother used to be—she's really changed herself a great deal under the psychiatrist's guidance—but that she used to be an excessively hysterical and emotionally tempestuous person, with all sorts of imaginary ailments herself, though not as extreme as John's, of course. And his father was almost exactly the same type."

"That's quite right, Dr. Redford," Fearing said earnestly.

Max nodded. "Apparently the combination of these two hereditary strains in John produced far more than a doubling of his parents' sensitivities.

"Just as the chameleon inherits a color-changing ability that other animals lack, so John has inherited a degree of psychosomatic control that is not apparent in other people—at least not without some kind of psychological training of which at present I have only a glimmering.

"All this was borne in on me as I absorbed John's story, hanging on every word. You know, I think both John and Velda were quite startled at the intensity of my interest." Max chuckled. "But they didn't realize that I was on to something. Here, right in my hands, was a person with, to put it popularly, only the most tenuous of boundaries between his mental and material atoms—for of course, as you know, both mind and matter are ultimately electrical in nature. Our John's subconscious mind had perfect control of his heartbeat and circulatory system. It could flood his tissues with fluids, producing instant swellings, or dehydrate them, giving the effect of emaciation. It could play on his internal organs and ductless glands as if they were musical instruments, creating any life-time it wanted. It could produce horrible discords, turn John into an idiot, say, or an invalid, as it tried to do, or perhaps an acromegalic monster, with gigantic hands and head, by stimulating bone-growth after maturity.

"Or his subconscious mind could keep all his organs in perfect tune, making him the magnificently healthy creature you see today."

I LOOKED at John Fearing and realized that my earlier impression of the excellence of his physique had, if anything, fallen short of the mark. It wasn't just that he was a clear-eyed, unblemished, athletically-built young man. There was more to it than that—something intangible. It occurred to me that if any man could be said to radiate health, in the literal meaning of that ridiculous cliche, it was John Fearing. I knew it was just my imagination, but I seemed to see a pulsating, faintly golden aura about him.

And his mind appeared to be in as perfect balance as his body. He was wonderfully poised as he sat there with just the sheet pulled around him. Not the faintest suggestion of nerves. Completely alive, yet in a sense completely impassive.

It was only too easy to imagine such a man making love successfully, with complete naturalness and confidence, without

any of the little haltings and clumsinesses, the jarrings of rhythm, the cowardices of Body, the treacheries of mind that betray the average neurotic—which is to say, the average person. Suddenly it hit me, right between the eyes as they say, that Velda *must* love John, that no woman could avoid becoming infatuated with such a man. Not just a football star or a muscle maniac, but a creature infinitely subtler.

And yet, in spite of all this, I was conscious of something a shade repellant about Fearing. Perhaps it was that he seemed too well-balanced, too smooth-running, like a gleaming dynamo say, or a beautiful painting without that little touch of ugliness or clashing contrast which creates individuality. In most people, too, one senses the eternal conflict between the weak and indecisive tyrant Mind and the stubborn and rebellious slave Body, but in Fearing the conflict seemed completely absent, which struck me as unpleasant. There was a kind of deep-seated toughness about him, a suggestion of indestructibility. One might have said, "He'd make a nasty ghost."

Of course all this may just have been envy on my part for Fearing's poise and physique, or some sort of jealousy I felt on Max's account.

But whatever the sources of my feeling of revulsion, I now began to believe that Max shared it. Not that Max had slackened in his genial, affectionate, almost fatherly manner toward John, but that he was so effortful about it. Those elephantine "our Johns," for example. I didn't get the feeling that he was concealing a jealous hatred, however, but that he was earnestly fighting an irrational inward aversion.

As for Fearing, he seemed completely unaware of any hostile feeling on Max's part. His manner was completely open and amiable.

For that matter, I wondered if Max himself were aware of his own feeling. All these thoughts didn't take much time. I was intent on Max's story.

MAX leaned across the desk. He was blinking excitedly, which, with his glasses, gave an odd effect of flashing eyes.

"My imagination was stirred," he went on. "There was no end to the things that might be learned from such a super-psychosomatic individual. We could study disease symptoms under perfect conditions, by producing them in controlled amounts in a healthy individual. All sorts of physiological mysteries could be explored. We could trace out the exact patterns of all the nervous processes that are normally beyond the mind's reach Then if we could learn to impart John's ability to other people—but that's getting a bit ahead of my story.

"I talked to John. He saw my point, realized the service he might render mankind, and gladly agreed to undergo some experiments.

"But at the first attempt a snag appeared. John could not produce any symptoms by a conscious effort, no matter how hard he tried. As I said before, you can't consciously fake a psychosomatic illness, and that was what I was asking John to do. And since he'd undergone psychiatric treatment his subconscious mind was so well behaved that it wouldn't yield to any ordinary blandishments.

"At that point we almost gave up the project. But then I thought of a way we might be able to get around the snag: suggestions given directly to the subconscious mind through hypnotism.

"John proved a good hypnotic subject. We tried it—and it worked!"

Max's eyes looked bright as stars as he said that.

"That's about how matters stand today," he finished off, sinking back in his chair. "We've started a little special work on arterial tension, the lymphatic glands and their nerve supply, one or two other things. But mainly we've been perfecting our setup, getting used to the hypnotic relationship. The important work still lies ahead."

I exhaled appreciatively. Then an unpleasant thought struck me. I wasn't going to voice it, but Max asked, "What is it, Fred?" and I couldn't think of anything else to say, and after all it was a thought that would have occurred to anyone.

"Well, with all this creation of extreme

symptoms," I began, "isn't there a certain amount of—"

Max supplied the word. "Danger?" He shook his head. "We are always very careful."

"And in any case," Fearing's bell-like voice broke in, "the possibilities being what they are, I would consider almost any risks worth running." He smiled cheerfully.

The double meaning I momentarily fancied in his words nettled me. I went on impulsively, "But surely some people would be apt to consider it extremely dangerous. Your mother, for instance, or Velda."

Max looked at me sharply.

"Neither my mother nor Mrs. Redford know anything of the extent of our experiments," Fearing assured me.

There was a pause. Unexpectedly, Max grinned at me, stretched, and said to Fearing, "How do you feel now?"

"Perfectly fit."

"Feel up to another little demonstration?"

"Certainly."

"That reminds me, Max," I said abruptly, "out in the corridor you mentioned something about—"

He shot me a warning glance.

"We'll go into that some other time," he said.

"What diseases are you going to have me do this time?" Fearing queried.

Max wagged his finger. "You know you're never told that. Can't have your conscious mind messing things up. We'll have some new signals, though. And, Fred, I hope you won't mind waiting outside while I put John under and give him his instructions—acquaint him with the new signals. I'm afraid we still haven't gotten far along enough to risk the possibly disturbing presence of a third person during the early stages of an experiment. One or two more sessions and it should be all right, though. Understand, Fred, this is just the first of a large number of experiments I want you to witness. I'm asking a great deal of you, you see. The only tangible compensation I can offer you is exclusive rights to break the story to the public when we feel the time is ripe."

"Believe me, I consider it a great honor," I assured him sincerely as I went out.

In the corridor I lit a cigarette, puffed it a moment, and then the tremendous implications of Max's experiments really hit me.

Suppose, as Max had hinted, that it proved possible to impart Fearing's ability to other people?

The benefits would be incalculable. People would be able to help their bodies in the fight against disease and degenerative processes. For instance, they could cut down the flow of blood from a wound, or even stop it completely. They could marshal all the body's resources to fight local infections and stop disease germs before they ever got started. Conceivably, they could heal sick organs, get them working in the right rhythm, unharden arteries, avert or stifle cancers.

It might be possible to prevent disease, even ageing, altogether.

We might look forward to a race of immortals, immune to time and decay.

A happy race, untroubled by those conflicts of body and mind, of instinct and conscience, that sap Mankind's best energies and are at the root of all discords and wars.

There was literally no limit to the possibilities.

I HARDLY felt I'd been in the corridor a minute, my mind was soaring so, when Max softly opened the door and beckoned to me.

Again Fearing lay stretched on the table. His eyes were closed, but he still looked every whit as vibrantly healthy as before. His chest rose and fell rhythmically with his breathing. I almost fancied I could see the blood coursing under the fair skin.

I was aware of a tremendous suppressed excitement in Max.

"We can talk, of course," he said. "Best keep it low, though."

"He's hypnotized?" I asked.

"Yes."

"And you've given him the instructions?"

"Yes. Watch."

"What are they this time, Max?"

Max's lips jerked oddly.

"Just watch."

He rapped with the pencil.

I watched. For five, ten seconds nothing seemed to happen.

Fearing's chest stopped moving.

His skin was growing pale.

There was a weak convulsive shudder. His eyelids fell open, showing only the whites. Then there was no further movement whatever.

"Approach him," Max ordered, his voice thick. "Take his pulse."

Almost shaking with excitement, I complied.

To my fumbling fingers, Fearing's wrist felt cold. I could not find a pulse.

"Fetch that mirror," Max's finger stabbed at a nearby shelf. "Hold it to his lips and nostrils."

The polished surface remained unclouded.

I backed away. Wonder gave place to fear. All my worst suspicions returned intensified. Once again I seemed to sense a strain of submerged evil in my friend.

"I told you I would show you something with a bearing on the question, 'What is death?' " Max was saying huskily. "Here you see death perfectly counterfeited—death-in-life. I would defy any doctor in the world to prove this man alive." There was a note of triumph in his voice.

My own was uneven with horror. "You instructed him to be dead?"

"Yes."

"And he didn't know it ahead of time?"

"Of course not."

For an interminable period—perhaps three or four seconds—I stared at the blanched form of Fearing. Then I turned to Max.

"I don't like this," I said. "Get him out of it."

There was something sneering about the smile he gave me.

"Watch!" He commanded fiercely, and rapped again.

It was only some change in the light, I told myself, that was giving Fearing's flesh a greenish tinge.

Then I saw the limp arms and legs stiffen and the face tighten into a sardonic mask.

"Touch him!"

Unwillingly, only to get the thing over with as swiftly as possible, I obeyed. Fearing's arm felt stiff as a board and, if anything, colder than before.

Rigor Mortis.

But that faint odor of putrescence—I knew that could only be my imagination.

"For God's sake, Max," I pleaded, "you've got to get him out of it." Then, throwing aside reserve, "I don't know what you're trying to do, but you can't. Velda—"

Max jerked as I spoke the name. Instantly the terrifying shell that had gathered around him seemed to drop away. It was as if that one word had roused him from a dream. "Of course," he said, in his natural voice. He smiled reassuringly and rapped.

Eagerly I watched Fearing.

Max rapped again: Three—one.

It takes time, I told myself. Now the muscles were beginning to relax, weren't they?

But Max was rapping again. The signal printed itself indelibly on my brain: three—one.

And yet again. Three—one. Three—one. THREE—ONE.

I LOOKED at Max. In his tortured expression I read a ghastly certainty.

I wouldn't ever want to relive the next few hours. I imagine that in all history there was never a trick conceived for reviving the dying that Max didn't employ, along with all the modern methods—injections, even into the heart itself, electrical stimulation, use of a new lightweight plastic version of the iron lung, surgical entry into the chest and direct massage of the heart.

Whatever suspicions I had had of Max vanished utterly during those hours. The frantic genuineness and inspired ingenuity of his efforts to revive Fearing couldn't possibly have been faked. No more could his tragic, rigidly suppressed grief have been simulated. I saw Max's emotions

stripped to the raw during those hours, and they were all good.

One of the first things he did was to call in several of the other faculty doctors. They helped him, though I could tell that from the first they looked upon the case as hopeless, and would have considered the whole business definitely irregular, if it hadn't been for their extreme loyalty to Max, far beyond any consideration of professional solidarity. Their attitude showed me, as nothing else ever had, Max's stature as a medical man.

Max was completely frank with them and everyone else. He made no effort whatsoever to suppress the slightest detail of the events leading up to the tragedy. He was bitter in his self-accusations, insisting that his judgment had been unforgivably at fault in the final experiment. He would have gone even further than that if it hadn't been for his colleagues. It was they who dissuaded him from resigning from the faculty and describing his experiments in such inaccurately harsh terms as to invite criminal prosecution.

And then there was Max's praiseworthy behavior toward Fearing's mother. While they were still working on Fearing, though without any real hope, she burst in. Whatever reforms the psychiatrist may have achieved in her personality, were washed out now. I still can close my eyes and visualize that hateful, overdressed woman stamping around like an angry parrot, screaming the vilest accusations at Max at the top of her voice and talking about her son and herself in the most disgusting terms. But although he was near the breaking point, Max was never anything but compassionate toward her, accepting all the blame she heaped on his head.

A little later Velda joined Max. If I'd still had any of my early suspicions, her manner would have dissipated them. She was completely practical and self-possessed, betraying no personal concern whatsoever in Fearing's death. If anything, she was too cool and unmoved. But that may have been what Max needed at the time.

The next days were understandably difficult. While most of the newspapers were admirably reserved and judicious in reporting the case, one of the tabloids played up Max as "The Doctor Who Ordered a Man to Die," featuring an exclusive interview with Fearing's mother.

The chorus of wild bleats from various anti-science cults was of course to be expected. It led to a number of stories that crept into the fringe of print and would have been more unpleasant if they hadn't been so ridiculous. One man, evidently drawing on Poe's story, "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," demanded that a "death watch" be maintained on Fearing and, on the morning of the funeral, hinted darkly that they were interring a man who was somehow still alive.

Even the medical profession was by no means wholly behind Max. A number of local doctors, unconnected with the medical school, were severe in their criticisms of him. Such sensational experiments reflected on the profession, were of doubtful value in any case, and so forth. Though none of these criticisms were released to the public.

The funeral was held on the third day. I attended it out of friendship for Max, who felt it his duty to be present. Fearing's mother was there, of course, dressed in a black outfit that somehow managed to look loud and common. Since the tabloid interview there had been a complete break between her and our group, so that her wailing tirades and nauseous sobbing endearments could only be directed at the empty air and the bronze-fitted casket.

Max looked old. Velda stood beside him, holding his arm. She was as impassive as on the day of Fearing's death.

There was only one odd thing about her behavior. She insisted that we remain at the cemetery until the casket had been placed in the tomb and the workman had fixed in place the marble slab that closed it. She watched the whole process with a dispassionate intentness.

I thought that perhaps she did it on Max's account, to impress on him that the whole affair was over and done with. Or she may conceivably have feared some unlikely final demonstration or foray on the part of the wilder anti-science groups and

felt that the presence of a few intelligent witnesses was advisable to prevent some final garish news item from erupting into print.

And there may actually have been justification for such a fear. Despite the efforts of the cemetery authorities, a number of the morbidly curious managed to view the interment and as I accompanied Max and Velda the few blocks to their home, there were altogether too many people roaming the quiet, rather ill-kempt streets of the scantily populated suburb. Undoubtedly we were being followed and pointed at. When, with feelings of considerable relief, we finally got inside, there was a sharp, loud knock on the door we had just closed.

Someone had thrown a stone at the house.

FOR the next six months I saw nothing of Max. Actually this was as much due to my friendship for him as to the press of my work, which did keep me usually busy at the time. I felt that Max didn't want to be reminded in any way, even by the presence of a friend, of the tragic accident that had clouded his life.

I think, you see, that only I, and perhaps a few of Max's most imaginative colleagues, had any inkling of how hard Max had been hit by the experience and, especially, *why* it had hit him so hard. It wasn't so much that he had caused the death of a man through a perhaps injudicious experiment. That was the smaller part. It was that, in so doing, he had wrecked a line of research that promised tremendous benefits to mankind. Fearing, you see, was irreplaceable. As Max had said, he was probably unique. And their work had been barely begun. Max had obtained almost no results of a measured scientific nature and he hadn't as yet any ideas whatever of the crucial thing: how to impart Fearing's ability to other people, if that were possible. Max was a realist. To his clear, unsuperstitious mind, the death of one man was not nearly so important as the loss of possible benefits to millions. That he had played fast and loose with humanity's future—yes, he'd have put it that way—was, I knew, what hurt him most. It would be a long time before he regained his old enthusiasm.

One morning I ran across a news item stating that Fearing's mother had sold her house and gone for a European tour.

Of Velda I had no information.

Naturally I recalled the affair from time to time, turning it over in my mind. I reviewed the suspicions I'd had at the time, seeking some clue that might have escaped me, but always coming to the conclusion that the suspicions were more than wiped out by Max's tragic sincerity and Velda's composure after the event.

I tried to visualize the weird and miraculous transformations I had witnessed in Max's office. Somehow, try as I might, they began to seem more and more unreal. I had been excited that morning, I told myself, and my mind had exaggerated what I had seen. This unwillingness to trust my own memory filled me at times with a strange poignant grief, perhaps similar to what Max must have felt at the breakdown of his research, as if some marvelous imaginative vision had faded from the world.

And occasionally I pictured Fearing as I'd seen him that morning, so radiantly healthy, his mind and body so unshakably knit. It was very hard to think of a man like that being dead.

THEN, after six months, I received a brief message from Max. If I were free, would I visit him at his home that evening? Nothing more.

I felt a thrill of elation. Perhaps the period of thralldom to the past was over and the brilliant old mind was getting to work again. I had to break an engagement, but of course I went.

It had just stopped raining when I swung down from the interurban. Remnants of daylight showed a panorama of dripping trees, weed-bordered sidewalks, and gloom-invested houses. Max had happened to build in one of those subdivisions that doesn't quite make the grade, while the unpredictable pulse of suburban life begins to beat more strongly farther out.

I passed the cemetery in which Fearing had been interred. The branches of un-

pruned trees brushed the wall, making sections of the sidewalk a leafy tunnel. I was glad I had a flashlight in my pocket for the walk back. It occurred to me that it was unfortunate Max had this unnecessary reminder almost on his doorstep.

I walked rapidly past houses that were more and more frequently separated by empty lots, and along a sidewalk that became progressively more cracked and weed-grown. There popped into my mind a conversation I had had with Max a couple of years ago. I had asked him if Velda didn't find it lonely out here, and he had laughingly assured me that both he and Velda had a passion for being alone and liked to be as far away as possible from spying neighbors.

I wondered if one of the houses I had passed had been that belonging to the Fearings.

Eventually I arrived at Max's place, a compact two-story dwelling. There were only a few more houses beyond it on the street. Beyond those, I knew, the weeds reigned supreme, the once hopeful sidewalks were completely silted and grown over, and the lamp-poles rusted lightlessly. Unsuccessful subdivisions are dismal spots.

In my nostrils, all the way had been the smell of wet cold earth and stone.

The living room lights were on, but I saw no one through the French window where I had once glimpsed Velda and Fearing. The hall was dark. I rapped at the door. It opened instantly. I faced Velda.

I HAVEN'T described Velda. She was one of those very beautiful, dignified, almost forbidding, yet quite sexy girls that a successful, cultured man is apt to marry if he waits until he's middle-aged. Tall. Slim. Small head. Blonde hair drawn tightly across it. Blue eyes. Compact, distinguished features. Sloping shoulders, and then a body that a cynic would call the main attraction. And perhaps with partial inaccuracy, because an alert, well-informed, quite courageous mind went with it. Exquisite manners, but not much apparent warmth.

That was Velda as I remembered her.

The Velda I faced now was different. She was wearing a gray silk dressing gown. In the dim light from the street lamp behind me, the tight-drawn hair looked, not gray, but brittle. The tall beautiful body somehow seemed sterile, weedlike. She crouched like an old woman. The distinguished features in the face she lifted toward mine were pinched. The blue eyes, white circled, were much too staring.

She touched a finger to her thinned lips, and with the other hand timidly took hold of the lapel of my coat, as if to draw me away to some place where we could talk secretly.

Max stepped out of the darkness behind her and put his hands on her shoulders. She didn't stiffen. In fact, she hardly reacted except to softly drop her hand from my coat. She may have winked at me, as if to say, "Later, perhaps," but I can't be sure.

"You'd better be getting upstairs, dear," he said gently. "It's time you took a little rest."

At the foot of the stairs he switched on the light. We watched her as she went up, slowly, holding on to the rail.

When she was out of sight Max shook his head and said, rather lightly, "Too bad about Velda. I'm afraid that in a little while—. However, I didn't ask you out here to talk about that."

I was shocked at his seeming callousness. A moment later, however, he said something which gave me a hint of the philosophy that underlay it.

"We're so mysteriously fragile, Fred. Some slight change in a gland's function, some faint shadow falling on a knot of nerve tissue, and—pouf. And there's nothing we can do about it, because we don't know, Fred, we simply don't know. If we could trace the thoughts in their courses, if we could set their healing magic radiating through the brain—but that's not to be for awhile yet. Meanwhile, there's nothing we can do about it, except to face it cheerfully. Though it is hard when the person whose mind goes develops a murderous hatred of you at the same time.

However, as I said, I don't want to talk about that, and you'll please me if you don't either."

We were still standing at the bottom of the stairs. Abruptly he changed his manner, clapped me on the shoulder, steered me into the living room, insisted that I have a drink, and busied himself starting a fire in the open grate, all the while chatting loudly about recent doings at the medical school and pressing me for details of my latest articles.

Then, giving me no time whatever to think, he settled himself in the opposite chair, the fire blazing between us, and launched into a description of a new research project he was getting started on. It concerned the enzymes and the mechanisms of temperature-control of insects, and seemed to have far-reaching implications in fields as diverse as insecticide manufacture and the glandular physiology of human beings.

There were times when he got so caught up in his subject that it almost seemed to me it was the old Max before me, as if all the events of the past year had been a bad dream.

Once he broke off momentarily, to lay his hand on a bulky typescript on the table beside him.

"This is what I've been keeping myself busy with these last few months, Fred," he said quickly. "A complete account of my experiments with Fearing, along with the underlying theories, as well as I can present them, and all pertinent material from other fields. I can't touch the thing again, of course, but I hope someone else will, and I want him to have the benefit of my mistakes. I'm rather doubtful if any of the journals will accept it, but if they don't I'll publish it at my own expense."

It really gave me a pang to think of how much he must have suffered pounding out that typescript, meticulously, of course, knowing that it wasn't his job any more or ever could be, knowing that it was the account of a failure and a personal tragedy, knowing that it wouldn't be at all well received by his profession, but feeling duty-bound to pass on information that might some day kindle another mind and prove of scientific value to mankind.

And then the tragedy of Velda, which I hadn't yet been able to properly assimilate, with its faint, last-twist-of-the-screw suggestion that if Max had continued his research with Fearing he might conceivably have learned enough to be able to avert the cloud shadowing her mind.

Yes, I thought then, and I still think, that Max's behavior that night, especially his enthusiasm about his new research project, into which he'd obviously thrown himself wholeheartedly, was an inspiring and at the same time heart-rending example of the sort of unsentimental courage you find in the best scientists.

Yet at the same time I had the feeling that his new project wasn't the real reason for his summoning me. He had something very different on his mind, I felt, and as an unhappy person will, was talking himself out on other subjects as a preliminary to getting around to it. After a while he did.

THE fire had died down somewhat. We had temporarily exhausted the topic of his new project. I was conscious of having smoked too many cigarettes. I asked Max some inconsequential question about a new advance in aviation medicine.

He frowned at the crawling flames, as if he were carefully weighing his answer. Then abruptly he said, without looking towards me, "Fred, there's something I want to tell you, something I felt I must tell you, but something I haven't been able to bring myself to tell you until now. I hated John Fearing, because I knew he was having a love affair with my wife."

I looked down at my hands. After a moment I heard Max's voice again. It wasn't loud, but it was rough with emotion.

"Oh come on, Fred, don't pretend you didn't know. You saw them through the window that night. You'll be surprised to know, Fred, how hard it was for me not to avoid you, or pick some quarrel with you, after that happened. Just the thought that you knew. . . ."

"That's all I did see or know," I as-

sured him. "Just that one glimpse." I turned and looked at him. His eyes were bright with tears.

"And yet you know, Fred," he went on, "that's the real reason I picked you to sit in on our experiments. I felt that knowing what you did, you would be better able than anyone else to check on my relationship with John."

There was one thing I had to say. "You are quite certain, Max, that your suspicions of Velda and Fearing were justified?"

One look at his face told me I needn't press that line of questioning any further. Max sat for a while with his head bowed. It was very quiet. The wind had died which earlier had splattered a few drops from nearby branches against the windowpanes.

Finally he said, "You know, Fred, it's very difficult to recapture lost emotions, either jealousy or scientific zeal. And yet those were the two main ones in this drama. For of course it wasn't until I had begun my experiments with Fearing that I found out about him and Velda." He paused, then went on with difficulty. "I'm afraid I'm not a very broadminded man, Fred, when it comes to sex and possession. I think that if John had been some ordinary person, or if I had found out earlier, I would have behaved differently. Rather brutally, perhaps. I don't know. But the fact that our experiments had begun, and that they promised so much, changed everything.

"You know, I really try to be a scientist, Fred," he went on, with the ghost, or cadaver rather, of a rueful smile. "And as a scientist, or just as a rational man, I had to admit that the possible benefits of our experiments infinitely outweighed any hurt to my vanity or manhood. It may sound grotesque, but as a scientist I even had to consider whether this love affair wasn't necessary to keep my subject cooperative and in a proper state of mind, and whether I shouldn't go out of my way to further it. As it was, I didn't have to vary my routine in order to give them plenty of opportunities, though I think that if that had been necessary, I might even have done it."

He clenched his fist. "You see, so very much depended on those experiments of ours. Though it's awfully hard for me to remember that now. The feeling's all gone . . . the tremendous vision . . this typescript here is just dead stuff . . . an obligation. . . .

"I feel differently about a lot of things now. About Velda and John, too. Velda wasn't exactly the girl I thought I was marrying. I've realized lately that she had a tremendous need to be adored, a kind of cold lust for beauty and ecstasy, like some pagan priestess. And I cooped her up here —the old story—and tried to feed her on my enthusiasms. Not exactly the right diet. And yet, you know, Fred, my life's work was inspired by Velda to an extent that you might find hard to believe. Even before I'd met Velda. The expectancy of her.

"And John? I don't think anyone will ever know the truth about John. I was only beginning to understand him, and there were sides to his nature I couldn't touch. A remarkable creature. In one sense, a true superman. In another, a mindless animal. Astonishing weaknesses, or blind spots. The influence of his mother. And then the way his instincts and conscience went hand in hand. I feel that John may have been completely sincere both about his desire for Velda and his desire to help me aid mankind. It may never have occurred to him that the two desires didn't exactly go together. It's quite possible he felt that he was being very nice to both of us.

"Yes, and if John and Velda's affair were something that could happen now, I think I would feel very differently about it.

"But then—? God, Fred, it's so hard to think truthfully about *them!* Then there existed in me, side by side, every moment of the day and night, the highest pinnacles of scientific excitement and the deepest pits of jealous rage. The one strictly subordinated!" A note of passionate anger came into his voice. "For don't think I was weak, Fred. Don't think I ever deviated so much as a hairsbreadth from the course that was scientifically and humanistically right. I kept my hatred for John in absolute check. And when I say that, I mean that. I'm no ignoramus, Fred. I know that when one tries to suppress feelings, they have a way

of bursting out through unsuspected channels, due to the trickery of the subconscious mind. Well, I was on the watch for that. I provided every conceivable safeguard. I was fantastically cautious about each experiment. I know it may not have looked that way to you, but even that last one—heavens, we had often done experiments twice as dangerous, or as seemingly dangerous, testing every step of the way. Why, Soviet scientists have had people technically dead for over five minutes. With John it couldn't have been one!

"And yet. . . .

"That's what tormented me so, don't you see, Fred, when I couldn't revive him. The thought that my unconscious mind had somehow tricked me and opened a channel for my all-too-conscious hatred, found a chink in the wall that I'd neglected to stop up, a doorway unguarded for a second. As he lay there dead before my eyes, I was tortured by the conviction that there was some little thing that would revive him at once if only I could remember what it was.

"Some little mistake or omission I'd made, which only had to be thought of to be corrected, but which my subconscious mind wouldn't let me remember. I felt that if only I could have relaxed my mind completely—but of course that was the one thing I couldn't do.

"I tried every way I knew to revive John, I reviewed every step I'd taken without finding a flaw, and yet that feeling of guilt persisted.

"Everything seemed to intensify it. Velda's frozen, suicidal calm, worse than the bitterest and most tempestuous accusations. The most childish things—even that silly occultist with his talk of a deathwatch on John.

"How John must hate me, I'd tell myself irrationally. Commanded to be dead, tricked into dying, not given the faintest hint of what was intended.

"And Velda. Never a reproachful word to me. Just freezing up, more and more, until her mind began to wither.

"And John. That miraculous body rotting in the tomb. Those magnificently knit muscles and nerves, falling apart cell by cell."

Max slumped in his chair exhausted. The last flame in the grate flickered out and the embers began to smoke. The silence was deadly.

And then I began to talk. Quietly. Nothing brilliant. I merely reviewed what I knew and what Max had told me. Pointed out how, being the scientist he was, he couldn't have done anything but what he did. Reminded him of how he'd checked and double-checked his every action. Showed him that he hadn't the shred of a reason for feeling guilty any longer.

And finally my talk began to take effect, though, as Max said, "I don't think it's anything you've said. I've been all over that. It's that at last I've unburdened myself to someone. But I do feel better."

And I'm sure he did. For the first time I truly sensed the old Max in him. Battered and exhausted of course, and deeply seared by a new wisdom, but something of the old Max, nevertheless.

"You know," he said, sinking back in his chair, "I think I can really relax now for the first time in six months."

IMMEDIATELY the silence settled down again. I remember thinking, queerly, that it was dreadful that a place could be so silent.

The fire had stopped smoking. Its odor had been replaced by that seeping in from the outside—the smell of cold wet earth and stone.

My taut muscles jerked spasmodically at the sudden grating of Max's chair against the floor. His face was ghastly. His lips formed words, but only choking sounds came out. Then he managed to get control of his voice.

"The cue! The cue for him to come alive again! I forgot I changed the signals. I thought it was still—"

He tore a pencil from his pocket and rapped on the arm of the chair: three—one.

"But it should have been—" And he rapped: three—two.

It is hard for me to describe the feeling

that went through me as he rapped that second signal.

The intense quiet had something to do with it. I remember wishing that some other sound would break in—the patter of raindrops, the creaking of a beam, the hollow surge of the interurban.

Just five little raps, unevenly spaced, but embued with a quality, force, and rhythm that was Max's and nobody else's in the world—as individual as his fingerprint, as inimitable as his signature.

Just five little raps—you'd think they'd be lost in the walls, gone in a second. But they say that no sound, however faint, ever dies. It becomes weaker and weaker as it dissipates, the agitations of the molecules less and less, but still it goes on to the end of the world and back, to the end of eternity.

I PICTURED that sound struggling through the walls, bursting into the night air with an eager upward sweep, like a black insect, darting through the wet tangled leaves, soaring crazily into the moist tattered clouds, perhaps dipping inquisitively to circle one of the rusted lamp-poles, before it streaked purposefully off along the dank street, up, up, over the trees, over the wall, and then swooped down toward wet cold earth and stone.

And I thought of Fearing, not yet quite rotted in his tomb.

Max and I looked at each other.

There came a piercing, blood-chilling scream from over our heads.

A moment of paralyzed silence. Then the wild clatter of footsteps down the stairs in the hall. As we sprang up together, the outside door slammed.

We didn't exchange a word. I stopped in the hall to snatch up my flashlight.

When we got outside we couldn't see Velda. But we didn't ask each other any questions as to which direction she'd taken.

We started to run. I caught sight of Velda almost a block ahead.

I'm not in too bad physical condition. I slowly drew ahead of Max as we ran. But I couldn't lessen the distance between myself and Velda. I could see her quite plainly as she passed through the pools of light cast by the street lamps. With the gray silk dressing gown flying out behind her, she sometimes looked like a skimming bat.

I kept repeating to myself, "But she couldn't have heard what we were saying. She couldn't have heard those raps."

Or could she?

I reached the cemetery. I shone my flashlight down the dark, leafy tunnel. There was no one in sight, but almost halfway down the block I noticed branches shaking where they dipped to the wall.

I ran to that point. The wall wasn't very high. I could lay my hand on its top. But I felt broken glass. I stripped off my coat, laid it over the top, and pulled myself up.

My flashlight showed a rag of gray silk snagged on a wicked barb of glass near my coat.

Max came up gasping. I helped him up the wall. We both dropped down inside. The grass was very wet. My flashlight wandered over wet, pale stones. I tried to remember where Fearing's tomb was. I couldn't.

We started to hunt. Max began to call, "Velda! Velda!"

I suddenly thought I remembered the lay-out of the place. I pushed on hurriedly. Max lagged behind, calling.

There was a muffled crash. It sounded some distance away. I couldn't tell the direction. I looked around uncertainly.

I saw that Max had turned back and was running. He vanished around a tomb.

I hurried after him as fast as I could, but I must have taken the wrong turning. I lost him.

I raced futilely up and down two aisles of tombstone and tomb. I kept flashing my light around, now near, now far. It showed pale stone, dark trees, wet grass, gravel path.

I heard a horrible, deep, gasping scream —Max's.

I ran wildly. I tripped over a headstone and sprawled flat on my face.

I heard another scream—Velda's. It went on and on.

I raced down another aisle.

I thought I would go on for ever, and

forever hearing that scream, which hardly seemed to pause for inhalation.

Then I came around a tangled clump of trees and I saw them.

My flashlight wavered back and forth across the scene twice before I dropped it.

They were there, all three of them.

I know that the police have a very reasonable explanation for what I saw, and I know that explanation must be right, if there is any truth in what we have been taught to believe about mind and body and death. Of course there are always those who will not quite believe, who will advance other theories. Like Max, with his experiments.

THE only thing the police can't decide for certain is whether Velda managed to break into the tomb and open the casket unaided—they did find a rusty old screwdriver nearby—or whether tomb and casket hadn't been broken into at an earlier date by some sort of cultists or, more likely, pranksters inspired by cultists. They have managed to explain away almost completely, all evidence that tomb and casket were burst from the inside.

Velda can't tell them. Her mind is beyond reach.

The police have no doubts whatsoever about Velda's ability to strangle Max to death. After all, it took three strong men to get her out of the cemetery. And it is from my own testimony that the police picked up Max's statement that Velda hated him murderously.

The odd position of Fearing's remains they attribute to some insane whim on Velda's part.

And of course, as I say, the police must be right. The only thing against their theory is the raps. And of course I can't make them understand just how tremendously significant those raps of Max, that diabolic three—two, seemed to me at the time.

I can only tell what I saw, in the flashlight's wavering gleam.

The marble slab closing Fearing's tomb had fallen forward. The tomb was open.

Velda was backed against a tombstone opposite it. Her gray silk dressing gown was wet and torn to ribbons. Blood dribbled from a gash above her knee. Her blond hair streamed down tangledly. Her features were contorted. She was staring down at the space between herself and Fearing's tomb. She was still screaming.

There before her, in the wet grass, Max lay on his back. His head was twisted backward.

And across the lower part of Max's body, the half-fleshed fingers stretching toward his throat, the graveclothes clinging in tatters to the blackened, shrunken body, was all that was left of Fearing.

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# The THIRD SHADOW

Heading by Lee Brown Coye

*. . . a certain oppressive sense of malignity.*

"AND the other man on the rope, Andrew," I asked, "did you ever encounter him?"

He gave me a quick glance and tapped the ash from his cigarette.

"Well, *is* there such a one?" he asked, smiling.

"I've many times read of him," I replied. "Didn't Smythe actually see him on the Brenva Face and again on that last dread lap of Everest?"

Sir Andrew paused before replying.

No one glancing casually at that eminent and superbly discreet civil servant, Sir Andrew Poursuivant, would have guessed that in his day and prime he had been the second-best amateur mountaineer of all time, with a dozen first ascents to his immortal fame, and many more than a dozen of the closest looks at death vouchsafed to any man. One who had leaped almost from the womb on to his first hill, a gravity defier by right of birth, soon to revolutionize the technique of rock-climbing and later to write two of the very finest books on his exquisite art. Yet there was something about that uncompromising buttress, his chin, the superbly modelled arête, his nose, those unflinching blue tarns, his eyes, and the high wide cliff of his brow to persuade the reader of faces that here was a born man of action, endowed with that strange and strangely named faculty, presence of mind, which ever finds in great emergency and peril the stimulus to a will and a cunning to meet and conquer them.

We were seated in my stateroom in the *Queen Elizabeth* bound for New York, he for some recurrent brawl, I on the interminable quest for dollars. The big tub was pitching hard into a nor-west blizzard and creaking her vast length.

I am but an honorary member of the corps of mountaineers, having no head for the game. But I love it dearly by proxy, and as the sage tells us, "He who *thinks on* Himalcha shall have pardon for all sins," and the same is true, I hope, of lesser ranges.

I dined with Sir Andrew perhaps half a dozen times a year and usually persuaded him on these felicitous occasions to tell me some great tale of the past. Hence on this felicitious occasion my "fishing" enquiry.

"Yes, so I remember," he presently said, "but are there not nice, plausible explanations for that? The illusions consequent on great height, great strain? You may remember Smythe, who is highly psychic, saw something else from Everest, very strange wings beating the icy air."

"He isn't the only one," I said, "it's a well-documented tradition."

"It is, I agree. Guides, too, have known his presence, and always at moments of great stress and danger, and he has left them when these moments passed. And if they do not pass, the fanciful might suggest he meets them on the other side. But who he is no one knows. I grant you, also, I myself have sometimes felt that over, say twelve thousand feet, one moves into a realm where nothing is quite the same, or, perhaps, and more likely, it is just one's mind that changes and becomes more susceptible and exposed to—well, certain *oddities.*"

"But you have never encountered this particular oddity?" I insisted.

"What an importunate bag-man you are."

"I believe you have, Andrew, and you must tell me of it!"

"That is not quite so," he replied, "but —it will be thirty-five long years ago next June, I did once have a very terrible ex-

*By H. Russell Wakefield*

perience that had associated with it certain subsidiary experiences somewhat recalcitrant to explanation."

"That is a very cautious pronouncement, Andrew."

"Phrased in the jargon of my trade, Bill."

"And you are going to relate it to me."

"I suppose so. I've never actually told it to another, and it will give me no pleasure to rouse it from my memory. But perhaps I owe it to you."

"Fill your glass, mind that lurch, and proceed."

"I haven't told it before," said Sir Andrew, "partly because it's distasteful to recall, and partly, for the reason that the prudent sea-captain turns his blind eye on a sea serpent and keeps a buttoned lip over the glimpse he caught; no one much appreciates the grin of incredulous derision."

"I promise to keep a straight face," I assured him.

"Yes, I rather think you will. Well, all those years ago, in that remote and golden time, I knew and climbed with a man I will call Brown. He was about my age. He had inherited considerable position and fortune and he was heir, also, to that irresistible and consuming passion for high places, their conquest and company, which, given the least opportunity, will never be denied, and only decrepitude or death can frustrate. Technically, he was a master in all departments, a finished cragsman and just as expert on snow and ice. But there was just occasionally an unmastered streak of recklessness in him which flawed him as a leader, and everyone, including myself, preferred to have him lower down the rope.

"It was, perhaps, due to one of these reckless seizures that, after our fourth season together, he proposed to a wench, who replied promptly in the affirmative. He was a smallish fellow, though immensely lithe, active, strong and tough. She was not far short of six feet and tipped the beam at one hundred and sixty-eight pounds, mostly muscle. With what suicidal folly, my dear Bill, do these infatuate pigmies, like certain miserable male insects, doom themselves with such Boadiceas, and how pitilessly and jocundly do those monsters bounce upon their prey! This particular specimen was terribly, viciously, "County," immensely handsome, and intolerably authoritarian. Speaking evil of the dead is often the only revenge permitted us and I have no intention of refraining from saying that I have seldom, almost certainly *never*, disliked anyone more than Hecate Quorn. Besides being massive and menacing to the nth degree, she was endowed with a reverberating contralto which loaned a fearsomely oraculate air to her insistent spate of edicts. Marry for lust and repent in haste, the oldest, saddest lesson in the world, and one my poor friend had almost instantly to learn. Once she'd gripped him in her red remorseless maw, she bullied him incessantly and appeared to dominate him beyond hope of release. Such an old story I need enlarge upon it no more! How many of our old friends have we watched fall prostrate before these daughters of Masrur!

"She demanded that he should at least attempt to teach her to climb, and females of her build are seldom much good at the game, particularly if they are late beginners. She was no exception, and her nerve turned out to be surprisingly more suspect on a steepish slope than her ghastly assurance on the level would have suggested. Poor Brown plugged away at it, because he feared, if she chucked her hand in, he would never see summer snow again. He did his very desperate best. He hired Fritz Mann, the huskiest and best-tempered of all the Chamonix guides, and between them on one searing and memorable occasion they shoved and pulled and hauled and slid her on feet and rump to creditably near the summit of Mt. Blanc. She loathed the ordeal, but she refused to give in, just because she knew poor Brown was longing to join up with a good party, and have some fun. I need say no more, you have sufficient imagination fully to realize the melancholy and humiliating pass of my sad friend. And, of course, it wasn't only in Haute-Savoie and Valais she made his life hell, it was at least purgatory for the rest of

the year; she was eternal punishment one might say. A harsh sentence for a moment's indiscretion!"

"What about those occasional feckless flashes?" I asked; "had she quenched and overlaid those, too?"

"Permit me to tell this story my own way and pour me out another drink. In the second summer after their marriage the Browns had preceded me by a few days to the Montenvert, which, doubtless you recall, is a hotel overlooking the Mer de Glâce, three thousand feet above Chamonix. When I arrived there late one evening I found the place in a turmoil and Brown, apparently almost out of his mind. Hecate had fallen down a crevasse that morning and, as a matter of fact, her body was never recovered. I took him to my room, gave him a stiff drink, and he blurted out his sorry tale. He had taken her out on the Mer de Glâce for a morning's training, he said, determined to take no risks whatsoever. They had wandered a little way up the glacier, perhaps further than he'd intended. He'd cut some steps for her to practise on, and so forth. Presently he'd encountered a crevasse, crossed by a snow-bridge, which he'd tested and found perfectly reliable. He'd passed over himself, but, when she followed, she'd gone straight through, the rope had snapped—and that was that. They'd lowered a guide, but the hole went down forever and it was quite hopeless. Hecate must have died instantly; that was the only assuaging thought.

" 'Should that rope have gone, Arthur?' I asked. 'Can I see it?'

"He produced it. It was poor stuff, an Austrian make, which had once been very popular but had been found unreliable and the cause of several accidents. There was also old bruising near the break. It wasn't a reassuring bit of stuff. 'I realize,' said Brown hurriedly, 'I shouldn't have kept that piece. As you know, I'm a stickler for perfection in a rope. But we were just having a little easy work and, as that rope's light and she always found it so hard to manage one, I took it along. I'd no intention of actually having to trust to it. We were just turning back when it happened. I swear to you that bridge seemed absolutely sound.'

" 'She was a good deal heavier than you, Arthur,' I said.

" 'I know, but I made every allowance for that.'

" 'I quite understand,' I said. 'Well, it's just too bad,' or words to that effect. I was rather at a loss for appropriate expressions. He was obviously acting a part. I didn't blame him, he had to. He had to appear heavy with grief when he was feeling, in a sense, as light as mountain air. He got a shade tight that evening, and his efforts to sustain two such conflicting moods would have amused a more cynical and detached observer than myself. Besides, *I* foresaw the troubles ahead.

"THE French held an enquiry, of course, and inevitably exonerated him completely, then I took him home to face the music, which, as I'd expected, was strident and loud enough. How far was it justified, I asked myself. He should, perhaps, not have taken Hecate up so far. Even if that rope hadn't gone, he'd never have been able to pull her up by himself—it would have taken two very strong men to have done that. He could merely have held her there, and she would, I suppose have died of slow strangulation, unless help had quickly come. Yet there is always risk, however prudently you try to play that game; it is the first of its rules and nothing will ever eliminate it. You must take my word for all this, which is rather outside your sphere of judgment. All the same the condition of that rope—and I wasn't the only one to examine it—didn't help things. Still, all that wouldn't have mattered nearly so much if he'd been a happily married man. I needn't dwell on that. Anyway the dirty rumor followed him home and resounded there."

"What was your candid opinion, Andrew?" I asked.

"I must ask you," he replied, "to believe a rather hard thing, that I had and have no opinion, candid or otherwise. It *could* have been a pure accident. All could have happened exactly as he said it did. I've no valid reason to suppose otherwise. He may have been a bit careless; I might have been

so myself. One takes such practice mornings rather lightly. There *is* risk, as I've said, but it's miniscule compared with the real thing. The expert mountaineer develops an exquisitely nice and certain "feel" for degrees of danger, it is the condition precept of his survival—and adjusts his whole personality to changing degrees. He must take the small ones in his stride. The errors of judgment, if any, that Brown committed were petty and excusable. His reason for taking that rope was sensible enough in a way."

"Yes," I put in, "I can more or less understand all that, but you actually knew him well and you're a shrewd judge of character. You were in a privileged position to decide."

"Was I? A very learned judge once told me he'd find it far easier to decide the guilt or innocence of an absolute stranger than of a close friend; the personal equation confuses the problem and pollutes the understanding. I think he was perfectly right. Anyway I am shrewd enough to know when I am baffled, and I have always felt the balance of probability was peculiarly nicely poised. In a word, I have no opinion."

"Well, I have," I proclaimed. "I think he had a sudden fearful temptation. I don't think it was exactly premeditated, yet always, as it were, at the back of his mind. He realized that bridge would go when she had her weight on it, knew a swift, reckless temptation, and let it rip. I think he'd kept that rotten rope because he'd always felt in a vague half-repressed way, it might, as they say, 'come in handy one day.' "

Sir Andrew shrugged his shoulders. "Very subtle, no doubt," he said, "and you may be right. But I know I shall never be able to decide. Perhaps it is that personal equation, for I was always fond of him, and he saved my life more than once at the greatest peril to his own; and since his marriage, that ordeal of thumb-screw and rack, I had developed profound sympathy for him. Hecate was far better dead. I greeted his release with a saturnine cheer. We will leave that point.

"Well, he had to face a very bad time. Hecate's relatives were many and influential and they pulled no punches, no stabs in the back, rather. No one, of course, actually cried, 'Murder!' in public but such terms as 'Darned odd!', 'Very happy release!', 'Accidents *must* happen!' and so on, were in lively currency.

"Very few people comprehend the first thing about mountaineering, just sultry, celluloid visions of high-altitude-and-octane villains slashing ropes, so this sepsis found receptive blood-streams. I did my best to foster antibodies and rallied my fellow-climbers to the defense. But we were hopelessly out-numbered and out-gunned, and it was lucky for poor Brown he had more than sufficient private means to retire from public life to his estate and his farming, and insulate himself to some extent against the slings and arrows which were so freely and cruelly flying about.

"I spent a week-end with him in April and was shocked at his appearance: even life with Hecate had never reduced him to such a pass. His nerves were forever on the jump, he had those glaring insomniac eyes, he was drinking far more and eating far less than was good for him; he looked a driven haunted man."

"Haunted?" I asked.

"I know what you mean," he said, "but I don't think I can be more definite. I will say, however, I found the atmosphere of the house unquiet and was very glad to quit it. Anyway, something had to be done.

" 'You must start climbing again, Arthur, I said.

" 'Never! My nerve's gone!' he replied.

" 'Nonsense!' I said. 'We'll leave on June third for Chamonix. You must conquer all this and at the very place which tests you most starkly. You will be amongst friends. It will be a superb nerve tonic. This tittle-tattle will inevitably die down—it has started to do so already, I fancy. There is nothing to fear, as you'll discover once you're fit again. Come back to your first, your greatest, your only real love!'

" 'What will people say?' he muttered uncertainly.

" 'What say they, let them say! Actually I think it'll be very good propaganda; no one'd believe a guilty man would return to the scene of such a crime. My dear Arthur,

you're a bit young to die, aren't you! If you stay moping here you'll be in the family vault in a couple of years. I'll get the tickets and we'll dine together at the Alpine Club on June the second at eight p. m. precisely.'

"To this he promptly agreed and his fickle spirits rose. So the fourth of June saw us entering the Montenvert, where our reception was cordial enough.

"IT TOOK him over a week, far longer than usual, to get back to anything like his old standard, but I'd expected that. On the ninth day I decided it was time for a crucial test of his recovery. It was no use frittering about, he'd got to face the hard thing, something far tougher than the practice grounds.

"After some deliberation I chose the Dent du Géant for the trial run. It was an old friend of ours, and the last time we'd done it, four years before, we'd simply raced to the aluminum Madonna which more or less adorns its summit. The Géant, I will remind you, is a needle, some thirteen thousand feet high, situated towards the southern rim of that great and glorious lake of ice, part French, part Swiss. part Italian, from which rise some of the most renowned peaks in the world, and of those the acknowledged monarchs are the Grandes Jurasses, the Grèpon Aiguilles and, of course, the Mont Blanc Massiv itself. It is sacred ground to our fraternity and the very words ring like a silver peal. The Géant culminates in a grotesque colossal tooth or rock, some of which is in a fairly advanced state of decay. These things are relative, of course, it will almost certainly be standing there, somewhat diminished, in five thousand years time. It provides an interesting enough climb, not, in my view, one of the most severe, but sheer and exposed enough. Nowadays, I understand the livelier sections are so festooned with spikes and cords that it resembles the fruit of the union of a porcupine and a puppet. But I have not revisited it for years and, for very sure, I never shall again.

"Brown agreed with my choice, which he declared himself competent to tackle, so off we went late on a promising morning and made our leisurely way up and across the ice to the hat. He seemed in pretty good shape, and once, when a most towering and displeasing sèrac fell almost dead on our line, he kept his head, his footing and his life. Yet somehow I didn't quite like the look of him. He didn't improve as the day wore on and to tell the truth, I didn't either."

HERE Sir Andrew paused, lit a cigarette, and continued more slowly. "You are not familiar with such matters, but I will try and explain the cause of my increasing preoccupation. We were, of course, roped almost all day, and from very early on I began to experience those *intimations*—it is difficult to find the precise, inevitable word—which were increasingly to disturb and perplex me on that tragic expedition. It is extremely hard to make them plain and plausible to you, who have never been hitched to a manila. When merely pursuing a more or less untrammelled course over ice it is our custom to keep the rope neither trailing nor quite taut, but always—I speak as leader—of course, one is very conscious of the presence and pressure of the man behind. Now—how shall I put it? Well, over and over again it seemed to me as if that rope was behaving oddly, as though the pull I experienced was inconsistent with the distance Brown was keeping behind me, as though something else was exercising pressure nearer to me. Do I make myself at all plain?"

"I think so," I replied. "You mean, as though there was someone tied to that rope between you and Brown."

"Nothing like so definite and distinct as that. Imagine if you were driving a car and you continually got the impression the brakes were coming on and off, though you knew they were not. You would be puzzled and somewhat disconcerted. I'm afraid that analogy isn't very illuminating. It was just that I was conscious of some inexplicable anomaly connected with our roped progress that day. I remember I kept glancing around in search of an explanation. I tried to convince myself it was due to Brown's somewhat inept, sluggish and er-

ratic performance, but I was not altogether successful in this attribution. To make it worse a thick mist came on in the afternoon and this increased our difficulties, delayed us considerably, and intensified my sombre and rather defeatist mood.

"Certain pious, but, in my view, misguided persons, profess to find in the presence, the atmosphere, of these doomed Titans, evidence for a benevolent Providence, and a beneficent cosmic principle. I am not enrolled in their ranks. At best these eminences seem aloof and neutral, at worst, viciously and virulently hostile—I reverse the pathetic fallacy. That is, to a spirited man, half their appeal. Only once in a long while have I been lulled into a sense of their good-will. And if one must endow them with a Pantheon, I would people it with the fickle and malicious denizens of Olympus and Valhalla, and not the allegedly philanthropic triad of heaven. In no place is the working of a ruthless, blind causality more starkly shown. And never, for some reason, have I felt that oppressive sense of malignity more acutely than during the last few hours of our climb that day, as we forced our groping way through a nightmare world of ice-pillars, many of them as high and ponderous as the Statue of Liberty, destined each one of them, soon to fall with a thunder like the crack of doom. And all the while I was bothered with that rope. Several times, as I glanced round through the murk, I seemed to sense Brown almost at my heels, when he was thirty feet away. Once I actually saw him, as I thought, near enough to touch. It was a displeasing illusion."

"Were you scared?" I asked

"I was certainly keyed-up and troubled. I am never scared, I think, when actually on the move. It was just that there was a noxious puzzle I couldn't solve. We were in no great danger, just experiencing the endemic risks inherent in all such places. But I was mainly responsible for the safety of us both and my mode of securing that safety was impaired."

"I imagine," I said, "that the rope establishes, as it were, some psychic bond between those it links."

"An unexpectedly precipient remark," replied Sir Andrew. "That is precisely the case. The rope makes the fate of one the fate of all; and each betrays along its strands his spiritual state; his hopes, anxieties, good-cheer, or lack of confidence. So I could feel Brown's hesitation and poor craftsmanship, as well as this inexplicable interruption of my proper connection with him.

"When we eventually reached the hut I had in no way elucidated the problem. I didn't like the look of Brown; he was far more tired than he should have been and his nerves were sparking again. He put the best face he could on it, as good mountaineers are trained to do, and declared a night's rest would put him right. I hoped for the best."

"Did you mention your trouble with the rope?"

"I did not," said Sir Andrew shortly. "For one thing, it might have been purely subjective. For another, what was there to say? And the first duty of the mountaineer is to keep his fears to himself, unless they are liable to imperil his comrades. Never lower the psychic temperature if it can possibly be avoided. Yet somehow, I cannot define precisely how, I gained the impression he had noticed something and that this was partly the cause of his malaise.

"The hut was full, but not unpleasantly so, with young Italians for the most part, and we secured good sleeping places. Then we fed and lay down. It was a night of evil memory. Brown went to sleep almost at once, to sleep and to dream, and to tell of his dreams. He was, apparently, well, beyond all doubt, dreaming of Hecate and—how shall I put it?—in contact, in debate with her. And what made it far more trying to the listener, he was mimicking her voice with perfect virtuosity. This was at once horrible and ludicrous, the most pestilential and disintegrating combination of all, in my opinion. He was, it seemed, pleading with her to leave him alone, to spare him, and she was ruthlessly refusing. I say 'it seemed,' because the repulsive surge of words was blurred, and only at times articulate; just sufficient to give, as it were, the sense of the dialogue. But that was

more than enough. The sleep-hungry Italians were naturally and vociferously infuriated, and I was compelled to rouse Brown over and over again, but each time he relapsed into that vilely haunted sleep. Once he raised himself and thrust out blindly with his arms. And Hecate's minatory contralto spewed from his throat, while the Italians mocked and cursed. It was a bestial pandemonium.

"The Italians left early, loud in their execrations of us. One of them, his black eyes wide with fear and anger, shook his lantern in my face and exclaimed 'Who is this woman!' 'What woman?' I replied. He shrugged his shoulders and said: 'That is for you to say. I do not think I would climb the Géant with him if I were you! Good luck, Signore, *I think you will need it!*' Then they clattered off, and at four o'clock we followed them.

"I KNOW now I should have taken that Italian's advice and got Brown back by the easiest and quickest route to the hotel, but when I tentatively suggested it, he almost hysterically implored me to carry on. 'If I fail this time,' he said, 'I shall never climb again, I know it! I *must* conquer it!' I was very tired, my judgment and resolution were at a disgracefully low ebb, and I half surrendered. I decided we would go up some of the way to a ledge or platform I remembered, at about the twelve thousand foot level, rest, eat, and turn back.

"We had a tiresome climb up the glacier, Brown in very poor form, and that nuisance on the rope beginning again almost at once. We crossed the big crevasse where the glacier meets the lower rocks and began to ascend. There was still some mist, but it thinned as the sun rose. I led and Brown, making very heavy weather, followed. The difference between his performance this time and that other I have mentioned, was gross and terrifying. I remember doubting if he would ever be a climber again and realizing I had made a shocking error in going on. I had to nurse him with the greatest care and there was always that harassing behavior of the rope. Only those with expert knowledge of such work could realize the great and deadly difference it made. I could never be quite sure when I had it properly firm on Brown, and he was climbing like a nervous novice. My own standard of the day was, not surprisingly, none too high. I'd had a damned bad, worried night and my mind was fussed and preoccupied. Usually one climbs half-subconsciously, that is the sign-manual of the expert, a rhythmic selection and seizure of holds, with only now and again a fully controlled operation of will and decision. But now I was at full stretch all the time and ever ready for Brown to slip. Over and over again I was forced to belay the rope to some coign of vantage and coax and ease him up, and there was forever that strong interruption between us. The Géant was beating us hands down all the time and I hadn't felt so outclassed since my first season in the Alps. The light became most sinister and garish, the sun striking through the brume, creating a potent and prismed dazzle. So much so that more than once I fancied I saw Brown's outline duplicated, or rather revealed at different levels. And several times it seemed his head appeared just below me when he was still struggling far down. And then there were our shadows, cast huge on the snow-face across the gulf, vast and distorted by those strange rays.

"That there were *three* such shadows, now stationary, now in motion, was an irresistible illusion. There was mine, there was the lesser one of Brown, and there was another in between us. What was causing it? This fascinating and extraordinary puzzle served somewhat to distract my mind from its heavy and intensifying anxiety. At last, to my vast relief, I glanced up and saw that hospitable little platform not more than sixty feet above me. Once there, the worst would be, I thought, over, for I could lower Brown down more easily than get him up.

"I shouted down to him, 'We're nearly there!' but he made no reply. I shouted again and listened carefully. And then I could hear him talking, using alternatively *his* voice and Hecate's.

"I cannot describe to you the kind of ghostly fear which then seized me.

There was I fifteen hundred feet up on a pretty sheer precipice with someone whose mind had clearly gone, on my rope. And I had to get him, first to the ledge, then try and restore him to a condition in which descent might be possible. I could never leave him there; we must survive or die together. First, I must reach that platform. I set myself to it, and for the time being he continued to climb, clumsily and mechanically, and carrying on that insane dialogue, yet *he kept moving!* But for how much longer would that mechanism continue to function and bring him to his holds? I conquered my fear and rallied again that essential detachment of spirit without which we were both certainly doomed.

"So I set myself with the utmost care to reach that ledge. Between me and it was a stretch of the Géant's rottenest rock, which I suddenly remembered well. It is spiked and roped now, I believe. When that gneiss is bad, it is very, very evil indeed. Mercifully, the mist was not freezing or we should have been dead ere then. How I cursed my insensate folly, the one great criminal blunder of my climbing career! This rush of rage may have saved me, for just when I was struggling up that infamous forty-five feet I got a fearful jerk from the rope. I was right out, attacking a short over-hang, exposed a hundred per cent, and how I sustained that jerk I shall never know. I even drove my teeth into the rock. It was one of those super-human efforts only possible to a powerful, fully-trained man at the peak of his physical perfection, when he knows that failure means immediate death. Somehow then he draws out his final erg of strength and resilience.

"At last I reached the ledge, belayed like lightning, gasped for breath and looked down. As I did so, Brown ceased to climb, screamed, and then a torrent of wild, incoherent words spewed from his mouth. I yelled at him encouragement and assurance, but he paid no heed. And, though he was stationary, clawing to his holds, the rope was still under pressure, working and sounding on the belay. No explanation of that has ever been vouchsafed me. For a moment my glance flickered out across the great gulf on to the dazzling slope opposite; and there were my shadows and Brown's, and another which seemed still on the move and reaching down towards him.

I COULD see his body trembling in every muscle and I knew he must go at any second. I shouted down wildly again and again, telling him I had him firm and that he could take his time, but again he paid no heed. I couldn't get him up, I must go down to him. There was just one possible way which, a shade technical, I will not describe to you. Nor is there need or point in doing so, for suddenly Brown relinquished all holds and swung out. As my eye followed him, once more it caught those shadows, and now there were but two, Brown's hideously enlarged. For a moment he hung there screaming and thrashing out with his arms, his whole body in violent motion. And then he began to spin most horribly, faster and faster, and almost it seemed, in the visual chaos of that whirl, as though there were two bodies lashed and struggling in each other's arms. Then somehow in his writhings he worked free of the rope and fell two thousand feet to his death on the glacier below, leaving my shadow alone gigantic on the snow.

"That is all, and I want no questions, because I know I should have no answers for them and I am off to bed. As for your original question, I've done my best to answer it. But remember this, perchance such questions can never quite be answered."

# The Body-Snatchers

BY SEABURY QUINN

Heading by Vincent Napoli

*Jules de Grandin said the story sounded incredible, such things did not happen — but he would withold judgment.*

STREET lights were coming on and the afterglow was faint in the west under the first cold stars as I let myself in at the front door. I'd had a hard day at the hospital, two T and A's in the morning and a cholitonotomy in the afternoon, and at my age surgery is almost as hard on the physician as the patient. "Thank

heaven, no calls this evening," I murmured as I shrugged out of my overcoat and started toward the study where I knew Nora McGinnis would have a preprandial cocktail iced and waiting for me.

My heart sank like a plummet as the voices came to me from the consulting room. "I realize this is more a case for a lawyer than a physician, but I've known Dr. Trowbridge since I was thirty seconds old, and I *have* to talk it over with somebody. Just going to an attorney seems so sort of—well, common, if you understand, Dr. de Grandin. There's never been a divorce in our family, but—"

"Hullo, there young 'un!" I greeted with wholly meretricious cordiality as I paused at the door. "What's all this talk about divorce—"

"Oh, Dr. Trowbridge, I'm *so* glad you've come!" Nancy Northrop fairly leaped from her chair and threw her arms about me. "I—I've been so miserable, Doctor!" The held-back tears broke through her eyelids and in a moment she was sobbing like a little girl whose doll is broken.

"There, there," I soothed, patting her shoulder. "A dry Martini won't cure the trouble, but it'll help. Come into the study, both of you."

Nancy Northrop was a small, pretty woman with bright hair, a straight little nose and wide-set amber eyes "put in with a smutty finger," as the Irish say. For a long moment she was calm, immovable as the embalmed bride of a Pharoah, staring broodingly into the tawny depths of her cocktail. "I just don't seem to have the proper words to tell it," she murmured finally. "You've known Norman and me all our lives, Doctor; you know we went together even in grammar school days, and when we married it was no more a surprise to anyone—including us—than setting down the sum beneath a column of figures would have been."

"That's so," I agreed. "You were childhood sweethearts, I remember. A lot of people thought it just one of those boy-and-girl affairs, but—"

"I said it was no more surprising than the sum arrived at when you add a line of figures," she broke in. "Well, someone made a mistake in addition, Doctor. Norman's left me."

"Eh? What d'ye mean, child?"

"Just what I said. He's—as the old song had it—'gone with a handsomer girl.' "

"*Tenez,* Madame," de Grandin interrupted, "suppose we start at the beginning and work forward. How was it that Monsieur your husband left you, and when?"

"Last Monday, sir. There was a party at the Lakerim Country Club that evening, and Norman and I went. We had the first few dances together, then Norman went somewhere—he was on the committee, you know—and the next I saw of him he was dancing with a strange girl."

"A stranger?" I prompted as she fell into a thoughtful silence, turning the stem of her glass between her fingers, biting her lower lip to hold it steady.

"Yes, sir, a stranger. No one seemed to know who she was—just how she came to be at the party, or who brought her is a mystery—but there she was in his arms, and"—she offered us a pitiful, small smile—"I must admit she was attractive and danced extraordinarily well."

"Can you perhaps describe her, Madame?" de Grandin asked as the silence lengthened again.

"Can I? Was there ever a woman who couldn't describe her successful rival down to the last hair of her plucked eyebrows and and final hook and eye of her gown? She was tall, as tall as a tall man, and built exquisitely—no, not exquisitely, grandly built is more nearly correct. She was more of a Minerva than a Venus. Her hair was dark, either black or very dark brown, and her eyes an intense blue, like the sea off Ogunquit or Hamilton. She must have just come back from Cuba or Bermuda, for her neck and arms and shoulders all seemed carved of smoky amber, and she wore an evening gown of red brocade, sleeveless, of course, and belted at the waist with a gold cord, Grecian fashion. Her sandals were gold, too, and the lovely sun-tan on her feet made them look gilded, except for the red-lacquered nails. Oh"—once more she gave a rueful little smile—"I couldn't any more

compete with her than Hera or Pallas could with Aphrodite! I'd never felt a pang of jealousy before, but when I saw my husband dancing with that gorgeous hussy I was positively green-eyed.

"They were playing *Tales From the Vienna Woods,* and she and Norm were waltzing to it like a pair of ballroom professionals when a man came from the conservatory and cut in. As she danced away with her new partner I could see her signalling Norman, positively teasing him with her eyes.

"The strange couple circled round the floor once then danced into the conservatory, and I felt everything inside me coming loose as I saw Norman follow them.

"I hadn't any business doing it, I know, it was a cheap, unworthy way to act, but I went in after them. Just as I reached the entrance to the greenhouse I heard voices raised in angry argument, then a crash, and Norman and the strange girl brushed past me. 'Brushed' is the verb, too. I might have been just one of the potted plants for all the notice they took of me. As they passed she linked her fingers round his arm and laughed. I heard her say, 'How handsome you are—' "

Nancy paused in her recital, and a puzzled frown formed on her face, as if she were endeavoring to see something just beyond her vision.

"Yes?" I prompted.

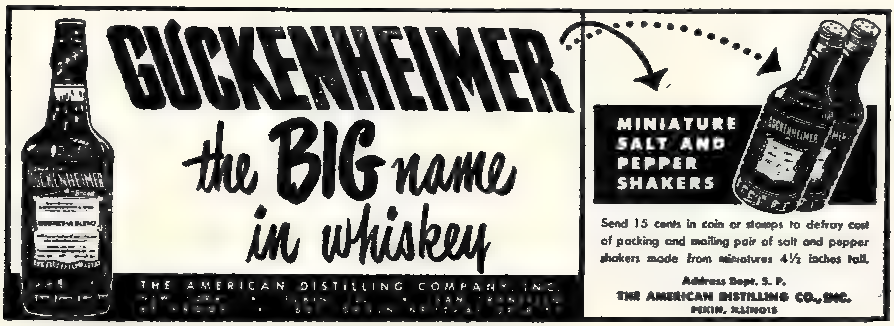
"That's what's worrying me, Doctor. What she called him. It wasn't Norm or Norman nor even Mr. Northrop. It was some other name, some strange name I had never heard."

HER preoccupation with the trifle annoyed me. "What happened next?" I asked a little acidly.

"I went into the conservatory, and as I staggered between the plants I knew just how an injured animal that crawls away to die must feel. I was so blinded by my tears that I didn't see the other man until I stumbled over him. He was lying on his back, both arms flung out as if he had been crucified against the floor, and blood was running from a cut in his head where he'd struck it against a jardinière as he fell.

"The first thing I thought was, 'He's dead. Norman's killed him!' but when I bent down I could hear him breathing hoarsely, and knew that he was only unconscious. I don't know how long I waited beside him. You see, I wanted to make sure that Norman had a chance to get away before I gave the alarm, but finally I ran back to the ballroom and told Ed Pennybacker what I'd found. Of course, I didn't tell him anything about the struggle I'd heard, or even about seeing Norman and the strange woman in the greenhouse. Dr. Ferris was at the dance, and went to give the man first aid, but in a moment he came back looking serious and muttering something about concussion. They called an ambulance and took him to Mercy Hospital."

"And where was Norman all this time?" I asked as she lapsed into brooding silence once more.



"I don't know, Doctor. I haven't seen him since."

"Wh—what?"

"That's correct, sir. He didn't come to take me home. Our car was gone from the parking lot, and I had to ride back with Joe and Louise Tralor. He didn't come home that night. He hasn't been home since, nor has he been to the office. O-oh!"

Her cry was a small sad sound that heightened and grew thinner, finally ravelled out to nothingness like a pulled woolen thread. "He's gone, Doctor; left me; deserted me!"

There are times when nothing we can say seems adequate. This was one of them, and so I had to content myself with patting her shoulder and murmuring, "There, there!"

She turned on me, eyes blazing with a sudden heat that fairly burned the tears away as she put her forefinger to her dimpled chin, made me a bobbing little curtsy and, like a little girl reciting, repeated:

"There, little girl; don't cry!
They have broken your heart, I know—"

Her voice cracked like a shattering glass, and her laughter was a ghastly thing to hear as she ran from the study and out the front door.

"THERE'S a Misther Northrop to see yez, gentlemen," Nora McGinnis told us as de Grandin and I sat over brandy, coffee and cigars in the drawing room after dinner that evening. "He says as how it's most important."

"*Tiens,*" de Grandin murmured. "Is it that the errant husband comes to tell us his side of the story, one wonders?"

"Humpf, it had better be a good tale he's cooked up," I answered. "The unconscionable young pup, treating Nancy that way—"

"Misther Northrop," Nora interrupted from the doorway.

He was a very ugly little man, some sixty-five years old, I judged, for his face was criss-crossed by a network of deep wrinkles and his small mustache was quite white. His eyes were small, black and deep-set, and what we could see of his hair was also white, though for the most part it was covered by a Sayer's occipital bandage. His clothes were well cut and of good material, very neatly pressed, but obviously not new. "Good evening, Dr. Trowbridge," he greeted as he paused at the door.

"Mr. Northrop?" I asked inquiringly. "I don't think that I've had the pleasure—"

The laugh that interrupted me was mirthless as the bark of a teased dog. "Oh, yes, we've met before, Doctor," he corrected. "It was thirty-two years ago, on the seventeenth of January, to be exact, in Mercy Hospital. I'm Norman Northrop."

I could feel a wash of angry blood in my cheeks. "If this is a joke—" I began, but once more his eerie, bitter laugh broke in.

"If it's a joke it's on me, Doctor. I don't understand it any more than you do, but *I'm Norman Northrop.*"

"*Grand Dieu des porcs!*" I heard de Grandin murmur almost soundlessly, then aloud, "Come in, Monsieur; come in and tell us how it comes that you are strange to Dr. Trowbridge, and, I damn suspect, to yourself also."

"Thank you, Doctor," the caller bowed acknowledgement of de Grandin's invitation and came into the drawing room. I noticed that he limped a little, as if he had suffered a slight stroke some time before, for his right foot dragged and turned in as he stepped.

"And now, Monsieur?" de Grandin poured an ounce or so of brandy into an inhaler, filled a demi-tasse and placed them at the stranger's elbow, motioning toward the cigars as he did so. "You are, one takes it, the husband of Madame Northrop who called on us this after—"

"Nancy's been here?" Our caller's face, already nearly colorless, went absolutely corpse-gray, and the hand that held his brandy glass shook with something more than the slight senile tremor I had noticed. "What did she tell you?"

"*Tiens,* the story was not pretty, Monsieur. She told us that you had deserted her; that you fought with some strange man for the favors of a strange woman; that then you went with your new charmer without so

much as one small backward look by way of valedictory."

THE caller seemed to shrink in on himself. The wrinkled skin around his mouth and on his neck seemed trembling like the dewlaps of a hound, and tears came in his small black eyes. "Please, gentlemen," he begged, "be kind enough to hear me through. Before I'm half done you'll call me a damned liar, and when I've finished you will think I'm drunk or crazy, maybe both; but what I have to say is true, every word of it.

"Nancy must have told you how we went to Lakerim Monday night. We had the first three dances together, and just as the band began playing for the fourth I saw Bob Eastman beckoning. Bob was on the committee, though why they put him there Lord only knows. If there's any way of snafuing a deal he'll find it. We'd gone all out on the refreshments, and Braunstein's were to furnish baked Alaskas for dessert. They hadn't come, and Bob was in a hissy. He'd called the caterer's, and they'd told him their wagon had left half an hour before. What should we do about it?

"I got Braunstein's on the 'phone and found that Bob had given orders for the desserts to be delivered to the Lake View Club instead of the Lakerim. Lake View is over by Morristown, you know, and Bob had belonged there before transferring to Lakerim. I suppose it was a pardonable slip of the tongue, but it had certainly snarled our party up. After several minutes' conversation I got 'em to promise to send another wagon out to Lakerim, and was hurrying to rejoin Nancy when I bumped into a girl.

"I mean that literally. The floor outside the steward's office was slippery. She was hurrying one way, I was barging through the door, and we collided like a pair of kids on roller skates. Both our feet went out from under us, and there we sat on our respective fannies, not hurt but with the wind knocked out of us. For a moment we grinned at each other, then I helped her up and apologized.

"She seemed to be taking inventory. 'I'm not hurt,' she told me, 'but I seem to have broken something. Will you take me to the powder room where I can make a few repairs, please?'

"The quickest way to the powder room was across the dance floor, and the quickest way to cross the dance floor was to dance rather than trying to dodge between the couples. So we danced.

"She was a superb dancer; you'd have thought the music ran through her nerves like wind through an Æolian harp.

"Just as we reached the far side of the ballroom her hand tightened on mine. 'Don't look now,' she whispered, 'but I'm being pursued by the Big Bad Wolf. He's been trailing me all evening.' She didn't seem frightened, just a little nervous and annoyed, and I didn't think much of it.

" 'Let's circle round the floor again,' she suggested. 'Maybe he'll get discouraged and go back to the bar.' So we waltzed around the floor again, and she went on, 'He's an old friend of my father's, a widower who's looking for a replacement. Honestly, he persecutes me! If he catches us he'll want to cut in, and I suppose you'll have to let him, but if you want to do your Boy Scout's daily good deed *please* follow us. He'll head for the conservatory—that's his technique—and all you'll have to do is wait a moment, then come barging in and say, "This is our dance, I believe," or something similarly original. Can do?'

" 'Can do,' I promised, and, as she predicted, there was her aged Lothario lying in ambush by the entrance to the conservatory.

" 'May I cut in?' he asked as he tapped me on the shoulder, and as I resigned my partner to him she whispered, 'Remember, Perseus, Andromeda'll be waiting to be rescued!'

"I watched them circle the ballroom and noticed that though he danced quite well he dragged his right foot. Sure enough, he guided her into the greenhouse, and in a moment I followed.

"I don't know just what I'd expected to find, but I was certainly unprepared for the tableau on which I stumbled. The little man had backed her up against the wall,

and stood threatening her with one of those case-knives—those things that snap an eight-inch blade out when you press a spring, you know. 'If I can't have you, no one else shall,' I heard him say as I entered the conservatory.

"I knew I had to do something, and do it in a hurry. The man was little, scarcely larger than a half-grown boy, but a crazy man armed with an eight-inch dirk is not a pleasant customer to deal with, and for a moment I was at a loss. Then the girl's appeal sparked me to action. 'Please, please!' she begged. 'He's crazy—mad as a hatter—'

" 'Put that knife up,' I told him. 'You're acting like a—'

"HE TURNED from her and came at me, and I knew I really had a maniac to deal with, for there was no light of sanity in his eyes, and at the corners of his mouth I could see little flecks of foam. 'So you're the favored swain tonight?' he rasped in a hard, gritty voice.

" 'Hit him; knock him senseless!' the girl begged. 'He'll kill us if you don't—'

"I hit as hard as I could, bringing my fist up from the hip and pivoting on my right foot to put my weight behind the blow. He went down like a pole-axed ox, but something seemed to go wrong with me at the same time. A paralyzing tingling, like the pins and needles we feel when a foot has gone to sleep, went up my arm as my fist struck his chin, and in a moment every nerve in my body seemed shrieking in agony.

"The pain was almost unendurable, but I couldn't make a move, just stood there, trembling as with a galvanic shock and saw the girl go up to him, take his left hand in her right, then felt her grasp my right in her left. The man got up and put his free hand over mine, so in a moment we had formed a circle, and they were moving slowly round and round, dragging me after them.

"I don't know what it was they said, or rather sang in a monotonous crooning tune, the words seemed meaningless—perhaps they were in some foreign tongue, perhaps they were just doggerel—but they kept repeating over and over, as near as I can remember:

*" 'Aristeas, Kartaphilos,*
*Ahasverus, Buttadaeus.' "*

*"Morbleu!"* ejaculated Jules de Grandin. "Are you sure that is what they said, Monsieur?"

"No, sir, I'm not. But that's as near as I can come to it."

*"Très bon,* my friend. Continue." The little Frenchman had leant forward, his small blue eyes fixed on our caller's face intently as a cat pins its gaze on a rathole. "Say on, Monsieur," he ordered. "We are listening."

"Well, in a moment it seemed that the greenhouse was in motion, too; turning in reverse to the way we moved. That is, we moved from right to left, counter-clockwise, while it seemed to revolve from left to right, and somehow I was being twisted mentally.

"It's hard to put in words, but somehow—don't ask me how, I don't know!—I seemed to be becoming someone else. The first thing that I noticed was that my right foot was dragging, and somehow I seemed smaller. I had to look up at the tall girl holding my right hand, and in a moment I seemed looking at myself—as if I saw my own reflection in a mirror, yet held the hand of the man in the looking-glass. All images were rather blurred, like things seen under water. Then suddenly I felt a dull ache at the back of my head as my knees sagged under me."

THE caller stopped his narrative and looked at us in turn, as though expecting us to finish the story.

"And then, Monsieur?" de Grandin prompted when the silence had lasted at least a minute.

"The next thing I knew I was lying in a bed. The bed was white, the walls of the room were white, everything around me was white and sterile. It was a hospital bedroom, I realized, but how I'd gotten there I had no idea. For a moment I lay there, trying to gather my wits, then I put out my

hand for the call-bell. That was the first shock I got. The hand I moved *wasn't mine.* I'm thirty-two years old, as you know, Dr. Trowbridge. The hand that moved when I reached for the bell was that of an old man, thin, bony, high-veined, speckled with liver-spots.

"I lay there for a moment, wondering if I were delirious, then called, 'Anybody around?' and that was the second shock. The voice that sounded when I formed the words in my mind wasn't mine. It was the thin, rasping treble of an old man. I recognized it! I had heard it in the conservatory when I found the old man threatening the girl.

"I don't know how long I lay there after that, and the more I tried to make sense of the senseless business the less sense it seemed to make. At last a nurse came in and greeted me with that false cheeriness they always use on patients. 'Good morning! Feeling better? That was a nasty crack on the head you had.'

" 'Nurse,' I begged, and my fear grew into absolute panic as I heard the senile piping of the voice with which I spoke, 'Please get me a mirror.'

" 'Oh, you're not disfigured, gran'paw,' she assured me as she took a hand-glass from the dresser and gave it to me. 'You'll be right as rain in a day or two.'

"There's not much use in trying to describe my feelings as I looked into the glass. The face that gazed back at me was not mine, but that of the old man whom I had knocked out in the conservatory.

" 'That's not—that isn't I!' I screamed. 'That's not my face—'

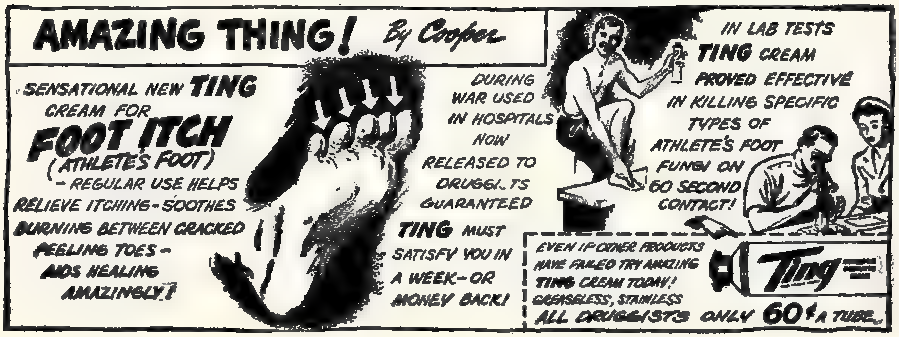
"The nurse took the mirror away. 'Take it easy, gran'paw,' she advised. 'Who'd you expect to see, Charles Boyer, or maybe Mickey Mouse?' She stepped out to the corridor and in a moment a young interne hurried in.

" 'Still pretty bad, eh?' I heard him whisper. He swabbed my arm with alcohol and drove a hypo into it. The anesthetic acted almost immediately, and I was out almost before I had a chance to protest.

"When I woke up the sun was slanting in the window and there were shadows in the corners of the room that hadn't been there when I first regained consciousness. My first thought was to ring the bell and ask to see the superintendent. Then I reconsidered. How I came to be in this old body I had no idea. It was like one of those dreadful things you read about in fairy-story books—or books of witchcraft and black magic—but one thing was sure: If I attempted to disclaim the body into which I seemed to have been thrust I'd get nowhere, except into the psychopathic ward. They'd given me a shot of dope that morning when they thought that I was still delirious from the blow on the head. Now, when I'd regained full consciousness, if I still insisted I was someone else—what would *you* have done if a patient acted that way, Dr. Trowbridge?"

"I'd be inclined to certify him—" I began, but he cut in sharply:

"Exactly. And you, Dr. de Grandin?"



JULES DE GRANDIN pursed his lips as if he were about to whistle, and tweaked the ends of his small blond mustache. "I do not know, my friend," he answered. "What you have told us sounds incredible. Such things just do not happen, as Dr. Trowbridge—or any jury of a lunacy commission—will assure you; but I withhold the judgment. Will you proceed?"

Our caller drew a deep, quick breath, whether of relief or excitement I could not determine. Then: "I realized that I had to 'go along with the gag,' so to speak," he said. "If I continued to deny my body I was headed straight for the padded cell; the only chance I had to gain my liberty was to keep silent, get out of the hospital as quickly as I could, and get in touch with Nancy. I wasn't sure that I could make her believe me, or that I could convince anybody, but it was worth a trial, while I was sure to be incarcerated if I fought against the form that had been thrust on me.

"So when the house physician came to see me I was meek as the proverbial Moses, making up a name and address for myself, answering all questions that he asked as promptly and with as much show of reason as I could. At four o'clock this afternoon they signed my release and I left Mercy Hospital.

"The only clothes I had were those I wore when I came to the hospital, of course, and they were a dinner kit. I couldn't very well go marching round in that, but fortunately there had been considerable money in the pockets, so when all charges had been paid at the hospital I still had better than a hundred dollars left. I called a cab and had him drive me to South Second Street, where the second-hand clothing stores are, you know. In one of those I got a pretty good outfit for fifty dollars, and the dealer allowed me twenty in trade for the clothes I wore, so I was not completely destitute.

"Next, I tried to get in touch with Nancy. I 'phoned her several times and got no answer, and when I went to the house it was closed and dark. I waited outside for a while, then when no one came, I thought of you and Dr. de Grandin, and—here I am."

The look he turned on us was that sick, apprehensive, slightly hopeful glance I'd seen so many patients wear when they were waiting for a diagnosis in suspected carcinoma. Despite myself I felt a pang of pity. This was a clean-cut case of organic dementia, probably consequent upon a head injury. What the hospital authorities were thinking of to turn a man in his condition out of doors was more than I could imagine. The patient seemed in a bland humor, but—

DE GRANDIN'S level voice broke through my thoughts. "I do not understand your case, Monsieur," he told the caller, "but I believe what you have said. What we can do about it I am not certain, but what we can do will be done, I assure you. You say you have sufficient money to provide for your immediate wants?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good. I would suggest that you find yourself lodgings and let us know where we can get in touch with you. Meantime, I shall make such investigations as seem necessary at the moment, and consult with you when I have completed them. Shall we say tomorrow afternoon at half-past four? Very well. Till then, Monsieur."

"That was the cruelest thing I've ever seen you do," I accused as the door closed behind the caller. "You know as well as I that he's a dement, probably suffering organic dementia as the result of a head wound, possibly complicated by senile dementia. To pretend belief in his delusions—"

"Can you remember what it was he said the man and woman chanted in the conservatory?" he broke in irrelevantly.

"Remember what they chanted—what in the world—"

"There are so many things in the world, my friend, not all of them to be found in the medical textbooks. Attend me, did he not say they repeated:

*" 'Aristeas, Kartaphilos,*
*Ahasverus, Buttadaeus'?*

Do those words mean anything to you?"

"No more than hickory, dickory, dock, or

eenie, meenie, mini, mo," I answered rather tartly.

"U'm? Are you familiar with the legend of the Wandering Jew?"

"You mean the character of whom Eugene Sue wrote?"

"*Monsieur le Général,* among others. In Greek tradition he is known as Aristeas, the Jewish folklore calls him Kartaphilos, another legend names him Ahasverus, while in the German lore he is called John Buttadaeus.

"*Le bon Dieu* only knows where the old legend started. It has been current throughout Europe for almost two thousand years, and has gathered many accretions in retelling, but one thing all the folk-tales have in common, whether they be Greek or Jewish, German, French or Italian: At the end of every century, or a cycle of approximately that length of time, the wretched man, accursed with immortality, falls into a stupor of some kind and wakes up as a young man of somewhere in the vicinity of thirty."

"Are you suggesting that this man who calls himself Norman Northrop might be—"

"I am suggesting nothing, my old one. What I have tried to point out is the possible connection between the names of one who had his youth miraculously restored and this species of possession which we seem to have here. It is not likely, I admit, but it is possible that by some kind of black magic the man who wore the body of the one who just left us was able to exchange his aging frame for the young, vigorous body worn by Monsieur Northrop, much as a tramp might steal the garments of a swimmer and leave his own rags in their place. You comprehend?"

"I should say not!" I jerked back. "This is the most fantastic, incredible sort of nonsense—"

"Forrester!" he exclaimed. "*Morbleu,* I do remember now! *Pour la barbe d'un bouc vert,* that is it!"

"Whatever are you raving about?" I demanded.

"Her name, *pardieu;* I had forgotten it, now it is that I remember!"

SHORTLY after luncheon the next day he came into the office, pleased as Punch with himself. "Observe, peruse, read him, if you will be so kind, my friend," he ordered, holding out a paper. "Does he not answer some, at least, of our so vexing questions?"

"AGED WOMAN COMMITTED"

the headline read, and under it:

> A jury in Judge Anslem's court today ruled that an unidentified old woman was insane. The respondent in the lunacy inquiry had claimed to be Margaret Forrester, nationally known swimming champion, who disappeared near Port of Spain, Trinidad, while bathing in the sea some time ago. The respondent had a fixed delusion that the missing young woman's soul had entered her body at the moment she was lost in the sea, and insisted that she be addressed as Miss Forrester, that the bank in which the missing swimmer's account was honor her checks, and that all property of the vanished young woman was hers.
>
> Miss Forrester, it will be remembered, was an orphan without near kin, and her estate has been in the hands of a conservator since her disappearance.

"Well?" I asked as I laid down the photostat.

He shook his head. "I do not think that it is well, Friend Trowbridge. That one person should suffer such obsessions is not matter for remark, but when two—a man and woman—suffer from identical delusions there is a smell of fish upon the business. Nor is that all. Not by any means. On my way from the office of *le journal* I called at Madame Northrop's and showed her a newspaper picture of the missing Margaret Forrester. What do you think she said?"

I drew bow at a venture, making as absurd a guess as seemed possible. "That the picture of Miss Forrester was that of the young woman with whom Norman went away?"

"*Mon Dieu!*" he almost shouted. "How

did you know it, my friend? Has Madame Northrop been here?"

"Of course not. I was merely trying to be as crazy as you seem."

"Crazy or not, I am convinced," he answered in a level voice. "Me, I shall investigate this business of the monkey, and see what is to be seen."

"I don't doubt it," I replied as I rose. "Run along and see what's to be seen. I've got some calls to make."

HE WAS almost as ebullient as a freshly mixed Seidlitz powder when he came bouncing in a few minutes before dinner. "*Pardieu*, my old, we make the progress!" he told me as he sipped his third Martini. "That Madame Nancy, she is superb, so is her brother, Monsieur Wilfred. They are most cooperative."

"How's that?" I asked as we went in to dinner.

He sampled the pottage Bellevue approvingly, and took a sip of sherry before he replied. "It seems that Monsieur Norman's watch was in a state of disrepair last Monday night, and so he borrowed Monsieur Wilfred's for the evening. It was a fine timepiece, that; a fine Swiss watch which cost four hundred dollars."

I looked at him in amazement. "I fail to see what connection there is between the value of a watch and —"

"Of course, you do, *mon ami*. I should have fallen in a swoon if you had. But listen, pay attention, regard me: When Monsieur Norman's body walked off with the strange young woman it wore Monsieur Wilfred's watch upon its wrist. To take away another's property without so much as by-your-leave is larceny, at least such actions will support a charge of theft. And so we have a police lookout broadcast for them, the one as principal, the other as accessory. I do not doubt that they will be arrested, and when they are I shall be ready for them with the party of surprise. Yes, of course."

"You speak of Norman's body as if it were a thing apart from him," I said. "Am I to understand that you believe that crazy man's story—the dement who was here last night and claimed to be Norman? Is it your theory the both Norman and the aging man are victims of some sort of possession?"

He gave me a long, serious look. "It are entirely possible, Friend Trowbridge. Today we make fun of the old belief in demoniacal possession, and of the possibility of spirit-transference. But can we say with certainty that the old ones were wrong and we are right? We call it epilepsy, or manic-depressive insanity, or sometimes dementia. They called conditions which exhibited the same symptoms possession. The Biblical accounts are far from complete, but any modern psychiatrist examining a patient having symptoms similar to those of King Saul would have no hesitancy in pronouncing him a manic-depressive. Remember how Saul brooded in black melancholy, then flew into a sudden rage and flung a spear at David? Or take the story of the Gadarene demoniac who flew into such frenzies that no chain could restrain him. Has not that the earmarks of what we call acute mania? It may be that the old ones were not foolish, after all."

"But that all happened long ago—"

"*Et puis?* The ancients died of carcinoma and tuberculosis and nephritis, just as we do, why should not we be subject to possession just as they were? Do not mistake me, my friend. I do not say possession explains every case of so-called mental aberration, or even many of them. But in a proper case what we call lunacy might be possession in the strict Biblical meaning of the term. Remember, if you please, possession was no common thing, even in those days. The instances of it that have come down to us have been preserved in the records precisely because they were so unusual. Why should it not be met with occasionally today? Every psychiatrist will tell you he's had cases which defied both diagnosis and treatment, cases not to be explained by anything but the modernly rejected belief in demoniacal possession."

"Well—er—" I temporized, "I suppose it's barely possible, but hardly probable—"

"*Précisément, exactement*, quite so," he nodded vigorously. "It is possibilities, not probabilities, with which we must deal here, my friend. Now—"

"Excuse me, sor, but Lieutenant Costello's on th' 'phone," Nora McGinnis interrupted. "He says as how th' pair ye wanted has been took up near Lake Owassa, an' th' sthate troopers is bringin' 'em down. They should be here in half a hour or so."

"*Morbleu*, but it is magnificent, it is superb!" he exclaimed jubilantly. "Come, Friend Trowbridge, let us hasten dinner, even at the peril to digestion. Either I am more mistaken than I think, or I shall show you something, me!"

LIEUTENANT COSTELLO had assigned a room to de Grandin, one of those bare, ascetic cells that characterize police headquarters, and implemented it according to the little Frenchman's orders. Two comfortable chairs had been placed in the center of the floor, and above them hung a powerful electric bulb whose coned-down light was enhanced by a powerful reflector-shade. The rest of the apartment seemed pitch-dark in contrast to the almost dazzling pyramid of light. At the far end of the room, hidden in the shadows, was a large metal clock that ticked with a sound like the beating of a hammer on an anvil and a deliberation like the surging of the surf upon the beach. *Tick*—tock; *tick*—tock, it told the seconds off slowly, and somehow, as absurd things sometimes pop into our minds, I was reminded of the clock inside the crocodile which followed Captain Hook in *Peter Pan*.

De Grandin looked about the bleak apartment with a smile of grim satisfaction. "All is in readiness, I damn think," he told us. "Bring them to me as soon as they arrive, *mon lieutenant*."

It might have been fifteen minutes later when the errant pair were ushered in by a patrolman and seated in the chairs beneath the light.

I recognized young Northrop at a glance, and saw the woman with him fitted Nancy's description exactly. A "gorgeous hussy," Nancy had called her, and she lived up to the term in every particular. Boldly but beautifully formed, she was, with long slim legs, a flat back, high, firm breasts, and a proud head set superbly on a full round throat.

"*Bon soir, Monsieur, Mademoiselle*," de Grandin greeted pleasantly. "I take it that you know why you have been made arrested?"

Norman Northrop cleared his throat a little nervously. "Some absurd charge of larceny! Bring the complainant here; I'll make good any loss he claims to have suffered—"

"*Monsieur!*" de Grandin's urbane voice had just the proper tone of incredulity. "Are you so utterly *naïf*? Could you not guess the charge of larceny was but an *attrape*, a hoax?"

"Then what—" Norman began, seemed to think better of the question, and lapsed into silence.

De Grandin made no answer, and the metal clock in its corner ticked loudly, deliberately. *Tick*—tock; *tick*—tock!

The little Frenchman reached into his waistcoat pocket, and took out his slim gold watch and swung it by its chain. Back and forth, pendulum-like, in perfect accord to the clock's deliberate ticking the watch swung, its brightly polished surface shining

like a dazzling disc of radiance in the cruel white light from the electric bulb.

"Tick—tock—swing—swing! I felt my head begin to move from side to side in rhythm with the ticking clock and swaying watch. There was an almost overwhelming fascination in the synchronized sound and movement. I saw Norman and the girl look away, turn their gaze upon the floor, even close their eyes, but in a moment they again looked at the blindingly-bright watch as it swayed in time to the clock's slow tick.

"Would it astonish you to learn that the statute against witchcraft has never been repealed in this state?" de Grandin asked in an almost gentle voice. "It was an oversight on the part of the legislature, of course, but"—the watch swayed slowly and the clock ticked loudly—"but it is still entirely possible for one—or two—to be convicted of the crime today, and made to undergo the ancient penalty. The stake, the fire—" His soft voice paused, but still the clock ticked loudly, slowly; still the blindingly-bright watch swung in long, sweeping arcs.

THE prisoners watched the swaying golden disc in fascination. First their heads turned slowly as it swung before them, then only their eyes moved in their motionless faces, finally the woman's chin fell downward to her chest. The man held out a few minutes longer, but finally his eyes closed and his head inclined toward one shoulder.

"Quickly, my friend," de Grandin thrust the watch back in his pocket as he rose. "Bid Costello have the cots brought in."

The lieutenant was ready, and as I opened the door two policemen trundled in a pair of wheeled stretchers of the kind used for emergency cases, lifted the unconscious man and woman on them and stood awaiting further orders.

*"Non,* not that way, *mes braves,"* de Grandin told them. "Their heads should be to the west and their feet to the east, that the magnetic currents of the earth may flow through them. Ah, so! *Très bon."*

For a minute or so he stood at the foot of the cots, then, "Aristeas, Kartaphilos, Ahasverus Buttadaeus, or by whatever name you are known, I order you to quit these bodies!" he whispered sharply. "Go, seek thy proper place, wherever that may be, but trouble Norman Northrop and Margaret Forrester no more! Begone!" He struck the unconscious man a sharp blow in the face, then to the woman he ordered, "Go thou, too, female counterpart of yon male wanderer. Go, get thee hence, ere I call down the ancient judgments on thee—the rack, the thumbscrews, the stake, the fire—" A sharp slap sounded. He had struck the woman in the face.

A silence we could fairly hear succeeded, for he had stopped the clock, and even the street noises outside were insulated from the little basement cell. There came a faint moan from the man on the wheeled litter. "Nancy!" he whimpered. "Nancy, dear, please try to believe me. I know you cannot recognize me, but this is I, your husband Norman—"

"Who says you are not recognizable, Monsieur, de Grandin cut in jubilantly. "Come, rise; get on thy feet"—he held his hand out to Norman. Madame your wife is waiting in the corridor outside. She has been told much of your story, and while she does not understand—*eh bien,* did not the good St. Paul say it? 'Love believeth all things.' Go to her, take her in your arms and tell her that you love her, and her only."

He fairly pushed the young man from the room and tiptoed to the bier on which the woman lay. "Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle Forrester!" he called softly.

"Wh—what?" The girl half rose, dropped back upon the litter and gave a small mewling cry. "Oh, *don't*—I tell you I *am* Margaret Forrester—"

"Of course you are, and who says otherwise is an unconscionable liar!" the little Frenchman chuckled. "You are indeed none other. Mademoiselle, and you are in proper person, too!"

The girl sat up and looked about the barren room half fearfully. Then she looked down at her hands. *"O-o-oh!"* the exclamation was a squeal of ecstasy. "They are my hands—*my* hands; my very own!" She raised her long, slim feet and looked at them and at the shapely legs and ankles to which they

were attached as if she'd never seen anything so beautiful. "*My* feet *my* legs—"

"And very pretty feet and legs they are, too," Jules de Grandin broke in gallantly. "Come, there is one outside who will be much surprised to see you. Monsieur Horace Hendry from the bank, who has been nursing your estate in your absence." He smiled and put a finger to his lips. "We shall not tell him everything we know, shall we? When he asks where you were—*tenez*, is it not woman's right to be mysterious?"

"Oh," the girl exclaimed, as she put both feet to the floor, took de Grandin's face between her large and well formed hands and kissed him first on one cheek, then on the other, and finally on the mouth. "Oh, you wonderful, wonderful little man! It's as if you'd brought me back from the dead! When you told me that you'd try this afternoon I hadn't any faith, but—"

"Mademoiselle!" his voice was filled with shocked reproof. "Remember, I am Jules de Grandin!"

"NO, I shall not try to tell you it was simple," he assured me as we drove home. "It was most damnably complicated, and I was not at all certain of the outcome till the end. Two and two is always four, but what if one mistakes a 3 for a 2? *Pardieu*, the sum will not meet the requirements, *n'est-ce-pas?*

"I went about my adding thus: When Monsieur Norman came to us last night I thought at first as you did. 'We have here a dement, bursting with delusions,' I tell me. But as he talked and I observed the youthful ardor of his speech in such strange contrast to his aged body, I began to wonder. And then all of a suddenly a memory came to me. The journal's story of the strange old woman who insisted she was Mademoiselle Forrester, and kept insisting what was obviously not so till they clapped her into durance in the lunatic asylum.

" 'Jules de Grandin,' I ask me, 'are it not odd that a man and a woman should have the same delusions, and at approximately the same time?'

" 'It are entirely extraordinary, Jules de Grandin,' I agree with me.

"So I go to the newspaper to refresh my memory, and there I borrow a picture of the disappeared young lady. I take it to Madame Nancy for her inspection, and without a moment's hesitation she identifies it as that of the woman who had gone away with her husband.

"Then, I ask you, what was it I did? *Parbleu*, I went to the asylum where they had that aged woman in confinement and talked with her. *Nom d'une barbe d'un chameau vert*, the story that she tells is strangely like that told by the old man who claims to be Monsieur Northrop!"

"She had been swimming in the sea near Port of Spain in Trinidad when she was accosted by an aged woman who met her as she emerged from the water and heaped insults and abuse on her. At last she could endure no more and struck her tormentor, whereat her whole arm seemed to be paralyzed, and she stood helpless on the sand.

"Then up there came a man, a man of sixty years or more, who took the woman by the hand and raised her, then seized the helpless young woman's hand and started to move round and round. And as they circled round upon the sand they crooned a song about Aristeas, and Kartaphilos and the rest of those queer names by which *le juif errant* has been known in different lands.

"Now I was sure that it was 2 and 2 and not some other figures that I added, and the answer must be 4!"

"Apparently their technique was unvarying. They induced someone previously chosen for his physical appearance to strike one of them, rendering him unconscious for a moment. Then they began their chant, their dance, their witches' incantation, and when the chant and dance were ended the stricken one had moved into the victim's body, leaving his old form to house the victim's soul or spirit or ego—whatever you may care to call it."

"Mademoiselle Forrester had been chosen as the new 'house' for the female of the pair; they left her in the old body and came to this country, where they settled on Monsieur Northrop as a suitable dwelling-place for the male member of this pair of body-snatchers."

"You know the rest, or nearly all of it. You know how we sent out police alarms, how we had them arrested and brought here, how I induced hypnosis by the ticking of the clock and swinging of my watch, having put the fear of prosecution for witchcraft in them, thereby focusing their attention—forcing it into a single channel, as one might say.

"Apparently unconsciousness was a prerequisite to their leaving the bodies they occupied. I induced it by hypnosis, then, since they were unable to work their charm, they took their flight to *le bon Dieu* only knows where when I ordered them to depart. And when they left, the spirits of Monsieur Norman and Mademoiselle Margaret returned to their proper bodies."

"What became of the—er—old bodies?" I asked as we turned into my driveway.

HE CHUCKLED. "They will not be used again, my friend. I called the Avondale asylum before we left police headquarters, and was told the aged woman who had claimed to be Miss Forrester had died at just 8:55, which was the moment when I called *la Forrester* from her swoon. Another call I made also. To the rooming house to which Monsieur Northrop went when he left us. The landlady informed me she had found her latest lodger dead in bed a few minutes before. *Voilà tout.*"

"But see here," I demanded, "who were these things, or demons, or whatever they were, who went around snatching bodies, living in them till they'd passed the climacteric, then trading them for others?"

He raised his shoulders in a shrug. "Who knows? Perhaps they were a wicked witch and wizard who had learned to make those vile exchanges, and thus acquire a pseudo-immortality. Perhaps they were a pair of elementals, that is, preadamite spirits who had never lived in human bodies, but somehow managed to get into them and liked them so well that they continued to tenant them, moving from one to another as a man may change his rented residence as it deteriorates or as he finds a more desirable dwelling.

"Who can say with certainty? Not I, the problem is too much for me."

He paused with a quick elfin grin as we entered the hall. "Is it not possible the ice box contains apple pie and beer to which we can give a more fitting home before we go to bed, Friend Trowbridge?"

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# The HAUNTED

By STANTON A. COBLENTZ

AND some are nearer to the haunts of ghosts,
And feel the shadowless rangers of the dark,
And hear invisible sounds on unseen coasts,
Whose lamps have beaconed many a weightless bark.
And some have held communion, not in speech
But by the signals of some fleeter sense,
With clouds and forms astir beyond the reach
Of us who go where walls are real and dense.

Always, with brows down-turned and ears that bend
To throbs and murmurs from the voiceless night,
They walk bemused, apart; their eyes distend
With awe and worship where there beams no light,
While through the world like alien souls they roam;
Like wanderers lost, who vainly look for home.

# Grotesquerie

**BY HAROLD LAWLOR**

**Heading by Vincent Napoli**

*The tenth dweller in Paradise Alley was the most horrible of all.*

EXCEPT for the undertaker and his assistants, I was the only one to attend the funeral. I was the sole mourner present, but I didn't grieve. All through those depressing services at the graveside, in the cold gray slanting November rain that held for me promise of sinusitis or pleurisy, only one thought, one question, really troubled me.

For seventeen years I'd known the com-

ponents of Vera Witmack's tragic story, yet the one essential element, the clue that would have tied them all together for my understanding persisted in eluding me. Not that I had sought so very hard to find that clue. To the contrary. I had endeavored *not* to think about it.

For there are some things that the mind rejects in horror.

But now as I stood there in acute discomfort, conscious of the wet ground underfoot and the unspeakably bleak dreariness of the cemetery on a day like this, I felt the answer very near me.

And I was right.

Just as the casket, its silvery sheen dulled with raindrops, sank through the dripping evergreen branches that shrouded the grave, I suddenly understood everything in one of those momentary flashes of lucidity that come so rarely in one's lifetime, but are not to be disputed when they do.

I knew now why Vera Witmack had sent me here. For it wasn't Vera Witmack being buried this day. She was still living, though she had died so long ago in her heart. I knew the reason for the curious alteration in her personality, and why she had so strangely repelled me for seventeen years. These questions were answered me too, for I understood at last the answer to that greater question—just how she had made of Martin Cox the horror that he had been.

VERA WITMACK was twenty-nine years old on that day, some twenty-three years before, when she'd first come to see me.

Miss Dorney, my secretary at that time, a thin acidulous spinster, came into my inner office, disapproval writ large on her narrow face.

"There's a woman to see you," she announced.

The plangent whine of her voice was so much more marked than usual that I said instinctively, "What's the matter with her?"

It developed that Miss Dorney's antipathy for my visitor had its origin in the fact that she was heavily and opaquely veiled. It was not a day when veils were a modish article of feminine apparel, and while Miss Dorney may not have known much, she did know one thing (sniff!): Here was a woman who would bear watching.

Miss Dorney's devotion to me was apt to be a bit trying at times. Veiled ladies were scarcely in my line, and I suspected my crabbed secretary had been reading a bit too much in Oppenheim.

Hiding annoyance as well as I could, I said, "Well, send her in. If she makes a pass at me, I'll set fire to the draperies."

Miss Dorney permitted herself another contemptuous sniff for my levity before throwing open the connecting door.

"Mr. Burnett will see you now," she announced acidly to the visitor yet hidden from my sight. And she held her skirt back eloquently, as if from contamination, as the visitor passed her.

It is true that the woman who entered wore a veil so thick that her features could not be discerned. Yet somehow, despite it all, she gave the illusion of beauty. Perhaps this was due to the glint of golden hair curling softly around the back of her hat, or the grace with which she moved, or the perfection of her legs sheathed in smoky chiffon of the sheerest.

When the door had shut behind Miss Dorney's ramrod back, I waved my visitor to a chair.

"I'm Vera Witmack," she said, when she had settled herself. Her voice was low and pleasing, thrilling to the ear as the soft throbbing music of marimbas. "I was referred to you by Mr. Alvin Purgis, of the Purgis and Stoneman shows."

I'm an investment counselor, and I number among my clients a great many people of the theatrical profession. My acquaintance among them has always been wide, for my father, when he was alive, had owned several theaters here in the city.

I knew Purgis, of course, though he wasn't strictly *"theater."*

"The carnival man," I said, to put her at her ease.

She nodded. "Until three months ago, I ran a mitt camp with one of his shows." She laughed, and translated unnecessarily, for I was familiar with the argot, "That is, I read palms for a living."

"I see."

Though her eyes were invisible to me through the veil, I felt that she was studying her black-gloved hands resting in her lap. They tightened on the purse she held now, from which involuntary movement I somehow deduced that what she was about to say next would be at the cost of some mental anguish to her.

In this assumption, I was correct.

On a hot July day three months before, she told me, a leopard escaped from its cage, terrorized the Purgis and Stoneman Carnival Shows, and killed a four-year-old boy not fifteen yards from where Vera's tent was pitched.

She was reading someone's palm at the time, but she ran out of her tent when she heard the screams of the child and snarls of the animal. The screams stopped abruptly, and the child lay ominously still in the hot, dry dust of the midway. The snarling beast crouched above him, worrying the rag-doll form.

Vera didn't hesitate. Courageously, if mistakenly, she went bare-handed to the rescue of the little boy. He was already dead, but she didn't know that. The leopard turned at her approach, and sprang in all its lithe, terrible beauty. Its weight knocked her from her feet. It clawed her face and upper body hideously before its keeper came belatedly running with a gun and killed it.

For weeks Vera lay in the hospital in a drugged stupor, and they despaired of saving her life.

"But, unfortunately, I recovered," she said now, with a gallant, rueful little laugh that robbed the remark of any hint of self-pity. "I must go on living, which brings me to my problem. I'm not married, and I must support myself. There are few positions one can hold in which one may go about heavily veiled without being an object of ridicule. And I certainly can't leave the veil off. Once this problem is settled and I can be sure of an income of some sort, I never intend to go about in public again, save at night after darkness falls."

I suppose I thought that she exaggerated, that she was suffering more from a psychic blow to her pride and vanity than anything else.

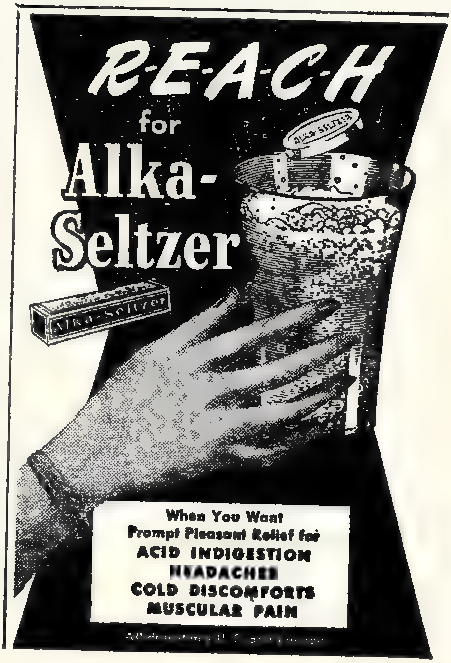
"Are you sure that's so necessary, or your problem so insoluble?" I asked gently. "You mustn't grow embittered, or unduly sensitive. Give people a chance. Believe me, they can be kinder and more understanding than perhaps you think."

SHE laughed again shortly. "I'm afraid it's hardly a question of mere kindliness from anyone. Look!"

Before I knew what she was about, she lifted her veil.

I caught only the briefest glimpse of that ruined face, yet I winced and hastily averted my glance. I hated myself for it. My face and neck grew red with shame. Worse, I knew it wasn't just a moment's involuntary reflex that I could overcome with time. I knew that if I saw her face daily for fifty years I should never be able to view it without shuddering.

Strangely it was she who comforted me. "There, Mr. Burnett. You mustn't mind. I



don't. I shouldn't have done it, I suppose, but I wanted you to understand how hopeless it was."

She touched my hand gently. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw that she had let the veil fall again. And again I hated myself for the craven relief that knowledge brought me.

I said thickly, "I'm sorry. I'm really dreadfully sorry, Miss Witmack. Forgive me, but I couldn't help myself."

"It's quite all right," she said casually, and I knew from her tone of voice that she had recovered possession of herself again. "But now—to this problem of earning a living. Mr. Purgis said that you would think of something, that you could help me if anyone ever could."

She moved forward and sat there eagerly on the edge of her chair. The blind faith in me implicit in her hopeful attitude was so great that I could scarcely bear it.

I got up and went to the window to raise it, that I might hide my feelings.

I know that the emotion I felt for Vera Witmack in those early days was never love, but pity is so closely akin. I had to help her somehow. But how? To offer anything that might be construed as charity was unthinkable.

I stood there thinking, fiddling with the curtain cord, watching the hordes of people moving ant-like on the busy avenue below.

Perhaps that's what gave me the idea. Certainly I wanted desperately to help this unhappy woman. Quite apart from the pity with which she filled me, I liked her. I liked her very much.

I said tentatively, "There's one thing—"

"Yes?"

I turned to face her. "Have you any money at all?"

She mentioned a sum—not large, but not inconsiderable, either. It consisted of her savings, and a sum that Mr. Purgis had settled on her, over her protests, after the accident.

I said, "That simplifies things then. The fact that you have a little capital. Miss Witmack, have you ever thought that in a great city the size of this one, there must be many other people like yourself desirous of living with a maximum of privacy and a minimum of embarrassment?"

"You mean—injured people?"

I nodded. "Often, late at night, I walk my dog. And I seem to see people about that I never see in the day-time. People badly crippled, and others who shield their faces with their arms as I approach. Why not use your capital to buy an old house, and take in boarders like these?"

The idea excited her, I could tell. I could see it in every eager line of her body as she leaned forward.

"But that sounds like a wonderful idea!" she cried. "Why didn't I think of it myself?"

"You wouldn't mind living with others afflicted like yourself?"

"Mind? Of course not. I'd not only be earning a living, but I'd have companionship. I had been resigned to the thought that I must live my days in loneliness." But a moment later, she drooped. "Still—what about neighbors? Surely they'd be curious about such an establishment? They'd pry, and ruin everything?"

But I had an answer for that, too.

"Many parts of the city close-in are becoming industrialized," I pointed out. "I often pass great old houses surrounded by light manufacturing plants, business places, garages. People come there only in the day-time. There are no neighbors in the real sense. If we could find such a house, situated in such a way that the ground would have no value for business, thus making the price prohibitive, why—"

She was eager again. "I've seen such houses, too. Oh, you'll find me one?"

And I promised that I would try.

SO IT was I, then,, who found her at last the house in Paradise Alley, that street mis-named if ever there was one.

It wasn't a street at all, really, in the true sense of the word—just a short spur leading off one of the main arteries that fed traffic to the suburbs. There was a factory on one corner where lampshades were manufactured, and on the other corner a warehouse. The warehouse was so constructed, and the street itself such a *cul-de-sac*, that

the two high-stooped, mansard-roofed old houses behind it were impossible of conversion to business purposes. But they could be thrown into one by the simple expedient of knocking out the party wall between them, and what money Miss Witmack had would just cover the purchase price, furnish the rooms inexpensively, and take care of such repairs as could not be postponed.

After that, it would be up to her.

She bought it, and I'm happy to say that she did quite well. In the six years ensuing, she not only recovered her original investment, but more than doubled it, turning over her monthly income to me to re-invest as cannily as might be to yield the greatest return.

Oh, it had been slow for her at first, of course. It was a year before she had her full complement of eight borders besides herself. And God knows where she ever found them, at that. She certainly never advertised publicly, but I suppose news of the strange boarding-house that she kept in Paradise Alley spread by word of mouth. Such things have a way of getting around.

Those six years cemented our friendship, but it seems odd to confess how little I really learned about her in all that time. I knew her father had been a German from Milwaukee; her mother a gypsy of Magyar descent. That was all. But in the light of what happened later, I suspect it was from her mother she must have learned those black arts that she possessed.

Of the eight boarders, the only one I ever grew to know fairly well at all was Andy Scholdt, the right side of whose face was one vast keloid from nose to ear. All the others, at my approach, scuttled away from me in the darkened halls, purposely kept dimly lighted by Vera that they might escape embarrassment.

Of these, two were freaks, I knew, retired from the Purgis and Stoneman show. There was a woman whose face had been horribly burned by acid, hurled by a jealous wife. There was a man without ears. There were—but why continue? To persist in the grisly catalogue of their infirmities savors too much of the morbid. To me they were only vague shadows, dimly seen, and the effect was decidedly eerie on those frequent occasions when I called at the house in Paradise Alley to discuss with Vera matters of business.

Andy Scholdt, too, had been chary of me at first. But we came to exchange salutations in time, though he was always careful to keep the damaged side of his face scrupulously averted from my eyes. Later he grew used to seeing me about, and as we talked more and more on every visit, gradually his shyness wore off.

I assure you that on the occasion of the first time he let me see his face in its entirety in the full glare of the electric light I felt immensely flattered, as if I had been awarded an accolade. For I had sensed something of the sort was going to happen eventually, and I had trained myself to show no trace of pity or horror when it did.

I flatter myself that I succeeded. For Andy never again showed the slightest embarrassment in my presence, and we became friends.

I am particular in thus describing Andy for it was he who unwittingly precipitated the tragedy.

I LONG had thought that I was the only visitor, called normal, ever to appear in Paradise Alley. But it seems that in this belief I was wrong.

At quarter to two one morning, my alarm clock went off, rousing me wearily from a deep sleep. I went to the bathroom, splashed cold water on my face till I reached a semblance of wakefulness, and then, drawing on a robe, I went to the living room of my apartment to pace impatiently while I awaited the mysterious visit of Andy Scholdt by appointment at two o'clock.

Andy had telephoned me the evening before, and his voice had sounded distressed. Could he see me? And since he went out only late at night when the streets were deserted, should I mind very much if he were to come to my apartment at two o'clock in the morning?

"It's about Vera Witmack," he added, as if afraid I would refuse to see him for his sake alone.

Of course I said that he might come.

He rang my bell now, just on the stroke of the hour. Tactfully I'd left only one small lamp burning, over on the desk at the far side of the room. We sat together on the sofa in the semi-gloom, after he'd refused my offer of a drink.

He sat there nervously dry-washing his hands in silence for some minutes, but I was completely unprepared for the question he asked when at last he spoke.

"Has Vera some money?" he wanted to know.

I was surprised, and a little annoyed by what seemed mere inquisitiveness. I said noncommittally, "Some."

"Enough—enough for a bum who never had a dime to try to get it away from her?"

It seemed no breach of confidence for me to nod.

He put his hand on my knee, urgently. "Irv—Irv, I want you to be very careful of Vera's money!"

I said somewhat stiffly, "I assure you—"

"No, no!" he interrupted me. "You misunderstand. I'm not implying any carelessness on your part." He bent his head, and clenched his hands nervously, and said miserably, "I guess I'd better tell you. No one ever comes to the house in Paradise Alley. No outsider, I mean, except yourself and—and my nephew, Martin Cox."

I was surprised. "I didn't know you had any family."

"He's my sister's son. His father died when he was a little boy, and I always felt a great sense of responsibility for him. But, Irv—he's no good. He's just no good!"

The anguish in Andy Scholdt's voice was so great that I sought to console him. "He can't be too bad, Andy. You said he comes faithfully to see you?"

Andy's smile in the dim light wasn't a pleasant thing to see. "Oh, but not out of affection! I give him money. Really a great deal of money. I've never been able to deny him. Funny thing. I can see through him easily. I know he's no good. But he can talk me into anything. I think he could talk anybody into anything. He's a very smooth customer, Irv, glib and persuasive. Make no mistake about that!"

"But what has all this to do with Vera Witmack?"

"He's shining up to her, too. Oh, I've never caught him at it, but I'm sure he is. Irv, I'll tell you something. After every time that Marty has been at the house, I hear Vera singing. Singing, mind you! Vera! You know as well as I do that she's always been a desperately unhappy woman. Then why all the happiness now? Happiness that moves her to song? Unless—" He broke off, shook his head rather despondently.

Personally I thought he was making a mountain out of a mole-hill.

"Well, suppose you're right," I said at last. "What do you want me to do about it?"

"I thought I'd better tell you," he said. "So you can be on your guard if Vera comes to you with any sudden demands for her money. Don't hand it over without an explanation. Don't hand it over at all, if you can possibly avoid it, unless you're sure she wants it for some legitimate purpose. If Marty is mixed up in this, as I fear, I don't suppose we can save her from heartbreak. But we ought to be able to see to it that she comes out of it with her money intact."

HE STOOD up then, having said his say, and I assured him I'd be careful, that I'd keep his warning in mind, and would do everything I could to dissuade Vera Witmack from any rash action she might propose.

But I'm afraid I didn't take any of it too seriously, for I knew that handicapped people, living in isolation, were prone to develop suspicious natures and to see danger where none threatened.

Early the next morning, my inter-com buzzed and Miss Dorney's thin voice grated on my eardrums.

"Miss Witmack and a gentleman calling to see you."

"What!"

To my certain knowledge, Vera Witmack had never appeared on the street in daylight for six years, once she was safely ensconced in the house in Paradise Alley.

Miss Dorney patiently repeated her in-

formation, and I recovered enough from my surprise to tell her to send them in.

Naturally I thought at once of the early-morning conversation with Andy Scholdt, so I wasn't too amazed to have Vera Witmack introduce her escort to me as Martin Cox.

Well, he looked all right. I'll say that much for him. None of this obvious eyes-too-close-together business—that description so beloved of authors in delineating villainy. He was big and blond, with a seemingly frank, open face and a manner that was bluff and hearty. Perhaps just a shade too bluff and hearty. I have ever been wary of glad-handers, and the suspicion crossed my mind now that no one was ever so glad to meet anybody as Martin Cox was to meet me.

I had sense enough to see that if he were to be an opponent at all, he'd be a dangerous one.

Inwardly I sighed.

Vera was veiled as usual, of course. She had never again permitted me to see her unveiled, after that one brief glimpse six years before. But happiness radiated from her, just the same. It hung about her like an aura.

She lost no time in acquainting me with the object of her visit. It was just as Andy Scholdt had feared. She wanted me to liquidate her assets, and turn the proceeds over to her in a lump sum.

"You see," she said, her voice softer than ever with love, "Martin and I are going to be married. Martin has a chance to get a franchise to operate a tire and automobile accessory store, and I'll not only be helping him but I'll earn a greater return on my money than I'm getting at present."

I drummed the edge of my desk with my fingertips. There were things I wanted to say, but Cox's presence made it a little difficult.

He was clever. He was either very sure of her, or else completely lacking in ulterior motive. I couldn't be sure which.

For he stood up, and his hand caressed Vera's shoulder briefly. "Honey, I think you and Mr. Burnett ought to discuss this alone. After all, it's your business." He overrode her protests, and patted her shoulder gently. "I could do with a cup of coffee, and I'll be in the cafe downstairs."

He shook my hand again genially before he took his departure. It was very gracefully done. If he felt any slight tinge of resentment at my caution and general lack of enthusiasm, he hid it completely.

With him out of the way it was easier, of course. I pointed out to Vera that she didn't know this man very well.

"I know him well enough," she said softly. I heard the hint of amusement in her voice that suggested she knew him far better than I ever could.

"I'm not saying this accessory store idea isn't all right," I went on. "But don't you think I ought to investigate it for you first?"

"Martin has already looked into it," Vera said. "And he assures me it will pay me eight percent, which is far more than my money is earning now."

I was patient. "But there's the factor of safety, Vera. As I've invested your money, the return may be smaller, but it's as secure as anything ever can be in this world."

"Quite apart from the question of return," Vera said, "my main consideration is the fact that I'd be helping Martin."

I tried a more personal attack. "I know you love him, my dear, but can you be sure he loves you?"

It was cruel of me, I suppose, for I think she winced, though through the veil I couldn't be sure. Certainly, though, she drew back a little in her chair.

"I know what you mean," she said, low. "My face. But Martin says he fell in love with my voice and my personality. He says it doesn't matter to him at all that I've been injured. Oh, I admit that I wasn't easily convinced. But in the end—" She spread her hands in a little rueful gesture. "After all, is it so highly improbable that he could love me? For instance, multilated or not, I've always felt that you liked me."

"Child!" I touched her hand. "Of course I do."

"Well, then, don't you see? If I could inspire liking in one man, why not love in another?"

It was the logic of a woman who was

herself in love. He had persuaded her, but perhaps not so much as she had persuaded herself. But, at any rate, I felt that it was useless to go farther on that tack. But I didn't give up. For fifteen minutes more, I tried to sway her, using every argument at my command.

In the end, she only grew annoyed.

"Mr. Burnett," she said at last firmly, "our business relationship has always been very pleasant. Please don't make me do something now to spoil six years of friendship."

From which I inferred she meant to sue me for her money if all else failed.

I had done what I could. It was her money, and I couldn't withhold it from her if she were so set on having it. Besides, I began to wonder if I were right. Who was I to play God, to be so sure that I knew what was best for Vera? I remembered Martin Cox's gentle hand on her shoulder. Perhaps he did love her. Even if Andy Scholdt were right, and Cox had never been any good, perhaps Vera was just the woman to change him. Love had worked miracles before.

As for my own vague distrust of the man, I recollected that I had vaguely distrusted a number of married men I'd met who were probably ideal husbands to their wives, no matter how I felt about them.

I sighed, still feeling troubled. But in the end, I promised to start selling Vera's securities. And she was quite satisfied when I told her it would probably take a few days to clear every thing up.

THAT was a Thursday.

I got busy at once, and by the next Tuesday I had a cashier's check covering every penny of the money that belonged to Vera, as well as a statement fully explaining all transactions. I sent the papers to her late that afternoon by registered mail, and then phoned to tell her they were on the way.

"Thank you, Mr. Burnett," she said. "You have been a good friend to me, and I'll never forget it. Martin and I will be married very quietly here next Saturday morning, and of course you must come to the wedding."

I promised that I would.

I spent a bad twenty-four hours then. Perhaps I sensed what was coming.

Andy Scholdt telephoned me at my apartment late Wednesday night. He was scarcely coherent at first.

"You promised me! You promised me, Irv!" he said over and over, reproachfully.

Strangely I knew what he meant. "I'm sorry, Andy. I did what I could, but it was no use. Besides, there was always the chance that we were wrong, and Vera right."

He laughed hysterically at that. "We were wrong? *Wrong?* And Vera was right?" He stopped then for some seconds, getting hold of himself. When he spoke again, it was more quietly, his voice heavy with dispair. "You'd better get over here at once, Irv. Trouble."

And he hung up in the midst of my agitated questions.

Andy let me in when I reached the house in Paradise Alley. No one else about the place stirred, but there was an almost sentient atmosphere of breathlessness about the house, as if its inmates knew that something was terribly wrong and they had hidden themselves away from the danger, awaiting its outcome. You sensed them there waiting, listening apprehensively behind their closed doors.

Andy drew me into the parlor, and closed the sliding walnut double-doors behind us.

I'd always hated that parlor. For some reason known only to herself, Vera had chosen to hang a murky copy of Van Gogh's gloomy painting, *The Potato-Eaters*, over the Victorian black marble mantel. Its somber colors seemed to set the key-note of melancholy for the whole house.

"Well, Andy, what's the trouble?"

"Vera endorsed her check over to Marty this afternoon," he said baldly. "Two hours later this came along to her by special delivery."

And he handed me an envelope, raggedly torn open at the side. I drew out the short folded note it contained.

It's seventeen years since I read that note, and I don't remember it verbatim. I don't think I wanted to remember it. But even today I can still feel some of the shocked

disbelief I felt then at its unmitigated venom. It was not enough that he told her he was leaving town, and wasn't marrying her. It was not enough that he told her he didn't love her. He had to taunt her cruelly, besides, with her ridiculous vanity in believing that *anyone* could love her.

She, he wrote, was a monstrosity who should hide herself forever from the eyes of men.

The loss of her money was bad enough, but this gratuitous brutality sickened me. I remember asking Andy in bewilderment, "But why? He had the money. Why did he have to do this—destroy the last vestiges of her pride?"

Andy made a grimace. "I told you he was like that."

"And Vera?"

He jerked his head upward. "In her room. She won't let me in. But I thought perhaps you—?"

I stuffed the note in my pocket, and went to the staircase in the outer hall. Andy trailed after me disconsolately. Together we ascended the stairs.

Vera's room was the large one at the front of the house. I knocked on the heavy walnut door. There was no answer.

"Vera," I called softly. "It's Irv Burnett. Please let me in."

Again there was no answer. I tried the door, and it was unlocked. I opened it, and looked in cautiously. Then I threw the door wide open, and went in, and again Andy followed me as if he were helpless to do anything else.

Vera, fully dressed and veiled as usual, was sitting bolt upright in an arm chair. She had the air of one who had been sitting there for hours, who would sit there forever if nothing happened to disturb her.

We went over to stand uncomfortably before her.

"Vera," I said, "I'm awfully sorry. Perhaps it isn't too late to do something."

She didn't answer.

I turned to Andy. "Where was Cox staying? He may still be there, for there was no real reason for him to rush out of town, as the check has been properly endorsed over to him."

Andy told me the name of Cox's hotel.

"I'll go there now," I said. "Perhaps I can force him to turn it over to me."

Andy brightened a little. It seemed a forlorn hope to me but at least it enabled me to persuade myself that I was doing something.

VERA spoke for the first time. "The money is unimportant," she said tonelessly. "The house is paid for and I can make more."

She spoke as the dead might speak.

With a deliberation that was frightening she lifted her veil and draped it back from her face. I don't know whence came the strength to enable me to conquer the almost overpowering impulse I had to turn my eyes away.

I stared at Vera. She might have been a woman carved of stone. Her one undestroyed eye gazed straight before her, obviously seeing nothing.

She said, "Marty shouldn't have written that note. I would have forgiven him anything else but that. I intend to take care of Martin Cox. You may leave me now. I have things to do."

It was obvious that for her we had ceased to exist. We left the room, Andy and I, awkwardly enough, closing the door quietly behind us.

I waited till we were down on the lower floor again before telling Andy, "I intend to go to Cox's hotel, just the same. But Vera frightens me. Stay in the upper hall, will you, and listen for anything wrong?"

"You think she plans to harm herself—or Marty?" Andy asked.

"In the condition she's in, there's no telling what she might do," I said. "Don't let her leave the house till I get back. I don't want her getting into further trouble. Keep an eye on her."

Andy promised faithfully that he would.

After telling me the name of the hotel, he had given me Martin Cox's room number, too; so that I was prepared to slip past the desk clerk and go directly to the fourth floor. But the desk clerk wasn't at his station, as it happened, and the lobby itself was deserted at that early hour.

It was a small hotel with only one elevator, and the cage was not at the lobby floor, either. I didn't ring for it, but took the stairs.

When I opened the steel door giving onto the fourth floor corridor, I knew at once that something was wrong. Here were the absent desk clerk and elevator boy, holding a confused colloquy outside a door from behind which came muffled screams, curses, and moanings.

Back of them, farther down the corridor, the heads of two or three guests protruded angrily from their rooms.

The clerk looked up at my approach, as I came down the carpeted hall, and in his agitation he must have mistaken me for a guest, too.

"One of the guests has been taken ill, sir," he said, indicating the door through which the muffled noises were coming. "Just go right along to your room. Everything will be taken care of. We—"

He was babbling nervously.

"How long has this been going on?" I asked. "Isn't that Martin Cox's room?"

"Some ten or fifteen minutes," the clerk said. "The occupant of the next room phoned the desk to complain. Are you a friend of Mr. Cox?"

I nodded.

"We can't imagine what is wrong. We've been afraid to go in because the noises don't—don't sound human, sir." The clerk wiped his forehead. "I didn't like to call the police for fear of giving the hotel a bad name. So I called the Psychopathic Hospital, and they've promised to send an ambulance and attendants to remove the—the gentleman."

I WANTED to see for myself what was going on behind the closed door of 418. I didn't believe that Vera Whitmack could possibly have reached here before me, even if she had been able to elude Andy's vigilance, but—

"Give me your pass-key," I ordered the clerk brusquely.

He handed it over without a word. I opened the door of 418 and walked into the brightly lighted room. Encouraged by my boldness, the clerk and elevator man followed me.

It was a perfectly ordinary hotel room—until I saw the writhing thing on the bed.

It was emitting those hoarse, agonized cries we had heard. It may have been in pain. Or it may only have caught a glimpse of itself in the mirrored closet door opposite the bed. I suspected the latter.

I say *it*.

But I knew who it was. There was only a travesty of a resemblance left in the hideous, freak-like thing that it had become.

But it was Martin Cox.

I heard a thud behind me. The desk clerk had dropped to the floor, ashen-faced. The elevator boy was nowhere to be seen. He must have fled precipitately after his first glimpse of that horror on the bed. And then I heard him being sick in the bathroom.

I acted now. My paralyzed muscles permitted it. I moved forward, head averted, and covered the thing on the bed with the sheet. It continued its writhing beneath it. The incoherent babbling it was making followed me as I went to the telephone on the desk.

Swallowing back sickness, I called the house in Paradise Alley. Andy must have been waiting, still faithfully guarding Vera. There was a telephone extension in that darkened upper hall. He answered in a minute.

"Vera," I said, "has she left her room at all?"

"No."

"You're sure?"

"Positive. I've heard her moving about ever since you left."

"I must talk to her," I said. "Call her at once."

I thought perhaps she'd refuse to come to the phone, but it was only seconds before she spoke to me. "Yes?"

It was only a word. It was only a voice heard over the telephone. But there was a change, a dreadful change. Cold thrills prickled my spine. I shrank back a little, looked at the telephone I held, as if it were responsible for the metamorphosis.

"Vera?" I asked doubtfully.

"You've called to tell me that something

has happened to Martin Cox," she stated. It definitely wasn't a question. And again I was repelled by that nameless something in her voice. Apathy? No. Something worse. Something worse than indifference, worse than lifelessness.

"How did you know?" I asked stupidly.

She didn't answer that. "Bring him here," she ordered.

Two men in white coats carrying a stretcher came into the hotel room behind me.

I said guardedly into the telephone. "I don't know if that will be possible, Vera. Martin isn't dead. He—"

"I know," she said.

How could she know?

I said again, "There are ambulance men here from the Psychopathic Hospital. They are supposed to take him there."

"Bribe them," she ordered me. "I want Martin Cox brought here to me."

She laughed then, if you could call it a laugh. Icy-footed mice scampered up and down my back at the sound.

And then she said the strangest thing of all.

"Surely now he has all the necessary qualifications to become a dweller with the rest of us in Paradise Alley?"

I heard the receiver click at the other end of the line.

WELL, I managed it. In all that welter of confusion, bewilderment, horror, I managed it somehow. It was not easy.

"Gee, buddy," the larger of the ambulance men said. "We can't do that. Take him to a private house."

"It's his home," I stretched a point.

"We were sent here on an emergency call. We can't go back with an empty ambulance."

"Tell them it was only a drunk," I suggested.

It was fortunate that I always carried a large sum of money with me at all times. Eventually I won them over. I swore I'd be responsible, that there would be no repercussions for them. And the money turned the trick.

They went over to the bed. Their bewilderment equaled my own. They looked at the small size of whatever it was that was writhing beneath the sheet. When one of them stretched out a hand to turn the sheet back, I stopped him.

"Leave it covered," I said sharply.

"Is—is it human?"

"It was," I said. "Put it on the stretcher just as it is. I'll ride in the ambulance with you."

I scarcely remember how we left the hotel with our burden, or any detail of the following ride through the dawn to the house in Paradise Alley.

Andy was waiting, and let us in. "Vera says to bring him up to her room." His eyes were wide with curiosity.

In the confusion of maneuvering the stretcher up the narrow stairs, I whispered to him, "You swear Vera didn't leave her room at any time?"

In a way, it was a ridiculous question. For even if she had, how could she have wreaked such damage on Martin Cox?

Andy had been regarding with puzzled wonderment the small size of the thing under the sheet. It was obvious that he could make nothing of it.

Now he shook his head, and answered my question. "I'll swear it. She was there all the time. But, Irv—there seemed to be someone with her. I could hear the murmur of voices. And I could—smell something."

"What? Smell what?"

"I—I don't know. I don't think I want to know. It was like she was burning matches, only worse. It smelled awful."

He shuddered.

The ambulance men transferred the stretcher's burden to Vera's bed, and left hastily, muttering between themselves. God knows what they made of it all.

We were left alone in Vera's room, she on one side of the vast Victorian walnut bed, Andy and I on the other.

It wasn't only Vera's voice over the telephone that repelled me. There was something about her now that made me glad the width of the bed was between us. I couldn't understand it, for I had always liked Vera. But now I could scarcely tolerate being in the same room with her.

I sniffed. Andy was right. The air was still faintly redolent of some unpleasant odor.

Vera lifted her veil, drew back the sheet covering the thing on the bed, and looked down on it. I wish I might have prepared poor Andy in some way. I heard him moan, and I knew that he had immediately recognized it, despite its appalling change.

As for Vera, she accepted it calmly. I tell you, she *knew* what Martin Cox was going to look like when he was brought to her! She seemed visibly to grow taller, Jovian, as she stood there looking down at him. There was a strange unfathomable iciness in her only eye.

He was a tiny thing, shriveled, hideously malformed. He swayed there crab-like on the white sheet, his screams long since died to fretful whimperings. The tiny bulging eyes looked up at her imploringly.

Vera spoke, in that new awful voice.

"I'll take care of you, Martin," she whispered. "I'll take care of you until you die. And that won't be for a long, long time, Martin."

The thing's whimperings rose to a muted frenzy.

It amused her. She smiled. The horror of that smile in the ruined face!

"But I wouldn't dream of marrying you now, Martin," she almost crooned. She reached down and touched the thing gently. It quivered under her hand. "You know why, don't you, Martin?"

It looked at her.

Somehow Andy and I managed to get out of that terrible room with its terrible occupants.

Somehow Andy and I got out of that terrible room with its terrible occupants.

For Vera was worse than the thing on the bed.

I SAW VERA only once after that. I could hardly bear to go near her. It wasn't her destroyed face that repelled me now, though she never again wore the veil. No. But there was something zombie-like about her, and the revulsion I felt never faded. It wasn't so much that something had been added to her personality as that something had been taken away.

Such business as it was necessary to transact, we handled by mail. I know she knew how I felt, for she never again pressed me for a personal interview or asked me to come to see her. You see, she knew the reason for my revulsion, even though I didn't.

I wondered, of course, what had made Martin Cox that which he had become. But I speculated really surprisingly little about it, for, as I said in the beginning, there are some things that the mind rejects in horror.

Andy Scholdt left the house in Paradise Alley, and went to live in a cabin he bought in an isolated spot far north in Wisconsin. He made no explanation of the sudden move either to Vera or me. And none was necessary.

It was seventeen years that Martin Cox lived, if you can call it living. Seventeen years that she tended him. Seventeen long years before Vera's voice over the telephone urgently besought me to attend the funeral. She herself would not go. She had not in all those years left the house in Paradise Alley.

I thought it passing strange that she asked me to go. But as I stood there in the November rain, watching the casket slowly lowered into the clay, I thought I had the answer. She had loved him. Loved him terribly all those years, so that she had not wanted him to go to his grave alone, consigned to the devil as he probably was.

*The devil.*

And then I knew. Of course. I had the answer that had always eluded me. And because some of the horror had faded in the seventeen years that had passed, I felt only a sick pity for that lonely woman in the house in Paradise Alley. That woman who would not live so very much longer now herself, I was sure.

What had she to live for, now that Martin was gone?

She had nothing. Nothing at all. Not even the soul she had bartered to Satan to aid her in making Martin Cox the tenth dweller in Paradise Alley.

# Something Old

Heading by Charles Kennedy

*Thoughts are things*
*. . . as the saying goes*

**BY ELIZABETH COUNSELMAN**

IT WAS a home wedding. Perhaps if it had been held in a church, even in the pastor's chapel, the whole hideous thing would not have happened. In the holy atmosphere of a church, standing before an actual altar, when Celia Mitchell said: *"I do!"* she would have been safe from the evil Force that . . .

But it was a home wedding. In the Mitchells' big living room, cleared of furniture now except for folding chairs borrowed from the city auditorium, flowers were banked along the walls. Guests were seated already, facing the picture window against which the pastor would stand to perform the ceremony. They kept up a low murmur of conversation, which died down only when Mary McPherson, near the piano, began to sing *"O Promise Me"* in her low sweet contralto.

In the library Bob Hanson, the young assistant curator of the museum, was standing first on one foot, then on the other. He grinned feebly at his white-haired "best man," who was also his superior and his uncle. Walter Ferris grinned back at him, patting his vest pocket.

"Yes, yes, I've got the ring!" he chuckled. "It's right here. In fact," he added humorously, "I happen to have six *more rings* on my person—if the one you bought for Celia gets lost!" At his nephew's puzzled look, the curator pulled out a small leather case and flipped it open, revealing half a dozen curious-looking circles of metal and semi-precious mineral. "Ran into Peabody on my way over here," he explained, "and he handed me the shipment from London. Nice specimens, aren't they?"

The bridegroom nodded absently, tugging at his collar. For perhaps the tenth time in the past three minutes, he glanced at his watch, muttering something about medieval torture as a way to start two people off on a happy marriage. Then he started nervously, as the study door flung open and a little girl in a frilly white dress dashed in, swinging her basket of rose petals. She beamed at her brother-in-law to-be and caught at his hand affectionately, displaying a missing front tooth in a smile.

"Bob! Thelia thaid would you or Misther Ferrith let her have thomething out of the mutheum? Anything little, for her to wear or hold. Mary lent her a garter to wear for *'borrowed,'* and she'th got thomething *'new'* and *'blue'* on her underclothes. But not anything *'old'*. . .!" the child, a seven-year-old edition of her sister, brought out the words in a breathless rush. "Thelia won't thtart without it! Mama thays it'th bad luck!"

Both men laughed, grateful for any diversion to ease the tension of waiting. Ferris, amused, reached for the phone, then suddenly remembered the leather case he had thrust back into his pocket. Snapping it open again, still laughing, he regarded the rings for a moment—a Fifth Century Syrian ring of banded agate, an Irish one of twisted wire, a leather English band cut from the finger of a glove, an East Indian thumb-ring of iron and silver. The white-haired curator of the museum peered at the collection briefly, then selected one of heavy black metal, hexagonal in shape, on each face of which was inscribed a queer symbol. He handed this to the little flower girl with an exaggerated bow.

"Here you are, my dear! This is probably the oldest relic in our collection—an old Babylonian betrothal ring, from the looks of it. You may tell the fair bride," he added with a twinkle in his faded blue eyes, "that the inscription reads . . . oh, something like: *'Mine, beloved; mine through eternity.'* Very romantic, eh?" He winked at the child, adding gallantly, "Don't tell your sister *I* sent it. Tell her it was Bob! Hmm?"

The little flower girl nodded, with the sly giggle of a conspirator in romance. She disappeared through the study doorway again—and in a moment, the first strains of *Lohengrin* seeped into the quiet room. Bob straightened like a doomed man marching to the Chair, then laughed at his uncle sheepishly.

"The things we helpless men go through!" he complained as they walked out together to stand beside the altar. There already, the fat pastor was beaming beneficently out over the throng, waiting for the bride to come pacing slowly down the aisle on her father's arm.

THEN she appeared, a pale blond vision in white satin with a chaplet of orange blossoms around the crown of her veil. If there had been a small white silk-covered Bible in her hands, instead of a bouquet of orchids and lilies-of-the-valley. . . . But it was a bouquet Celia carried, smiling tremulously at her baby sister, dancing ahead of her to scatter rose petals. On her right hand—the only ring she wore—Bob noticed the heavy antique circlet. He grinned, casting a grateful glance at his uncle. The old rascal: wouldn't give him a raise in salary large enough to cover a diamond, along with the lovely little cottage Bob had built for Celia. But at the last minute, he *would* make a gesture like this—giving his nephew's bride an ancient betrothal ring that must have cost the museum a sum well into five figures! Old Walter Ferris, his nephew suspected fondly, was constantly at war within himself between what he wanted to be, a hard-boiled executive, and what he was, a sentimental dreamer.

At that moment Celia stepped to a place beside him, and the young assistant curator could see nothing else beyond her lovely excited face.

"Dearly beloved," intoned the pastor, "we are gathered here together in the sight of God to unite this man and this woman in . . ."

Bob sighed, slipping a loving little wink at the girl by his side. Then, abruptly, his eyes went grave and anxious, observing on the face of his bride a sudden startled expression. She was not looking at him, but

beyond him, beyond his uncle also, at a shadowy spot beyond the altar. Her slim white throat contracted all at once, as though she were fighting hard to stifle a scream that welled up from her inmost being. Bob followed her gaze, but could see nothing. Then he noticed that Celia was tugging at the heavy ring on her finger, trying to get it off. This in itself was puzzling, as the thing had seemed at least two sizes too large for her slender hand. Now, though, it would not come off, not even turn. As she twisted at it frantically, a tiny drop of blood welled out from under the broad dark metal and splashed redly upon her white satin skirt.

"Do you, Robert Edward Hanson, take this woman to be. . . ?" the pastor was asking in a ringing voice.

Bob replied in an absent murmur, staring at his bride's hand. Celia glanced at him with a helpless' little grimace, and whispered:

"Darling, the ring—it won't come off! What'll I do? It's so *tight* all at once. . . ."

Her husband-to-be moved closer to her, with a protective gesture that caused watching matrons to breathe a fluttery sigh of reminiscence.

"Don't worry about it, sweetheart," Bob whispered back, smiling. "We'll have it filed off later. Does it hurt you?"

"Yes!" Celia whispered. "It . . . My finger must be swelling. It's cutting me terribly!"

"Do you, Celia Anne Mitchell, take this man. . . ?" the pastor pursued, frowning sternly at this whispered interruption.

"I do!" the bride pronounced—followed by a little gasp, quickly suppressed. Again Bob, and his uncle as well, saw her tug at the ring, as a second, then a third drop of blood ooze from beneath it to splash over the virgin whiteness of her wedding dress.

Then in a swift rush of words and ritual, the ceremony was over, and the young couple were climbing into Bob's waiting car, laughing and dodging the rain of rice that was thrown at them. Celia, in a pale blue suit and straw hat with tiny pink flowers under the brim, nestled close to her new husband as they drove away, followed by a clanking tail of tin cans and old shoes tied to the rear bumper.

"Thank heavens that's over!" the girl laughed, breathlessly. "Now you're supposed to put your arm around me and say, 'Alone at last!' That's part of the ceremony!"

Bob obeyed, reciting "Alone-at-last" with such mechanical lack of expression that Celia pinched his arm.

"My cavalier!" she peered, then her expression softened as she glanced down at the massive ring on her right hand, looking awkward and ill-fashioned in contrast to the slim platinum band on her left hand. "But you *are* romantic, after all," she sighed. "Oh, Bob, it was such a dear thing to do—giving me this old, old ring from a collection. A Bayblonian betrothal ring, your uncle said. And the inscription is just perfect!"

Her husband gulped guiltily, then decided that this was one of the few things he would not tell her. Instead, he patted her hand.

"I picked it out just for you," he lied happily. "You wouldn't let me spend our refrigerator fund on a solitaire, remember! Frugal little housewife already, aren't you?" he teased, then frowned. "But I was worried at the ceremony. About that ring, I mean." He poked at the dark band, which now hung loosely on the girl's finger. "Wonder why your knuckle swelled up like that? Some sort of allergy to the metal, do you suppose?"

THE bride shrugged, slipping off her hat and nestling her head on his shoulder. "Oh—nerves, probably. But it . . . it seemed all at once to have *tightened*. And . . . then . . ." She stopped, laughing and shrugging. "Oh, for goodness sake! I haven't seen a bogeyman in a dark corner since I was Betsy's age! And didn't she look darling?" Celia prattled on happily. "Bob . . . Let's not wait too long to start having children of our own. First, I'd like to have a—"

"Bogeyman?" Bob interrupted, amused. "What did you mean by—?"

"Oh—nerves again!" The girl tossed off his solicitude. "It was when the minister

started— And then again, just as I said: *"I do!"* Over there in that shadowy corner beyond the piano. I . . . I thought I saw something, that's all." She laughed lightly, but the man noticed a small shiver ripple down her bare arms, in a wake of gooseflesh that felt rough to his caressive touch.

"Saw what? The ghost of your wicked past?" he jibed pleasantly. "All those poor broken-hearted guys who promptly jumped off ninety-nine bridges when they read our wedding announcement in the paper?"

Celia made a face at him, then dropped her eyes uncertainly. Once again that odd little shiver swept over her like a breath of cold wind.

"No; it was—well, at first it looked like a dog! A huge shaggy wet dog, like a Saint Bernard. And—dark gray all over, except that the *head*——" She shuddered now visibly, pressing closer to the man at the wheel and pulling his arm around her shoulders. "Oh, let's not talk about it any more!" she begged. "It was just a silly fancy! Here, darling, keep this for me. It's so heavy, and it keeps slipping off. I wouldn't ever, ever want to lose it! *'Mine, beloved; mine through eternity!'* " she quoted the inscription softly, then slipped the big ring into Bob's pocket.

THE small mountain hotel they had chosen for their honeymoon was perched on a laurel-crested ridge overlooking five states. As they entered the lobby self-consciously and approached the desk, a benign little man popped up from nowhere, snapping his fingers at a sleepy-eyed Negro porter.

"Bridal suite?" he whispered, winking at Bob in a way that sent a titter over those wandering about in the lobby. "Oh, the Hansons—of course! Have your reservation right here. Yes, yes," he added archly, still in that stage whisper that left the young couple flushed and giggling. "Honeymooners? You'll be happy to know that our bridal suite is sound-proofed! Nobody listening in to those sweet nothings you'll want to say to this charming young lady!"

Closing the door after the grinning porter a few minutes later, Bob and Celia burst out laughing, and melted together in a long kiss. Arms entwined, they stood for a moment, looking out through a broad French door that opened upon a small balcony. Below it, the mountain fell away in a green sweep of tree tops, completing the illusion that they were alone on some tiny planet suspended far above the earth. The girl sighed.

"Oh, Bob, I'm so glad we could get the bridal suite! Mother and Dad spent their honeymoon here, I think I told you. And . . . and that's why I wanted so much to . . ." She broke off shyly, glancing at him from the corner of her eye. "Darling?" she whispered. "Let me have my ring back—I want to wear it while—while you run down and get me a pack of cigarettes, or something. Would you? That's part of the ceremony, too! Then we'll have dinner sent up to us, and watch the sun go down. Oh, Bob, I love you so much!" She flung herself into his arms happily, then shoved him toward the door, laughing.

Bob handed her the ring, and went out, smiling softly to himself.

Because of his solicitude for his bride, for her shy feeling of strangeness, he wandered about the lobby below for perhaps half an hour.

(*Perhaps if he had not done so——But there are so many ifs, as Walter Ferris remarked to me later, when he told me the strange story.*)

Actually it had begun at the ceremony. But, to Bob, knocking on the locked door of his bridal suite, it began just there—

For, Celia, his bride, would not open the door. Dusk had fallen over the mountains outside, and a few faint stars were already creeping into the sky. Bob knocked again, more loudly, calling his wife's name. There was an answer—a harsh shrill voice, shouting at him in a language he had never heard before. A woman's voice. It sounded, he said, like Celia's and yet not like her soft mellow tones. He was able to distinguish one or two words: "*ziggurat*," and "*shimtu*," then a string of words that sounded peculiarly like a chant: "*inuma ilu-awelum. . . .*"

At that, startled and anxious, he began

to hammer on the door, aware of other sounds that issued through the locked portal. There was, as he described it, a *rushing* sound, as of a high wind blowing—although the night outside was still and warm, with heat-lightning flickering across the southern sky. Twice he heard what he described as "a deep, horrible growling noise, like an ape, but with a queer suggestion of words."

Then, frantic, he began to batter the door down by charging against it with his broad young shoulder. It splintered at the third impact, and the young bridegroom almost fell inside, followed closely by the porter and the benign-faced clerk who had heard the commotion from below.

Celia lay on the broad bed, clad in a pale green negligee that hung in ribbons, all but torn from her body. Blood ran from her bruised mouth, and there was hardly a spot on her slender half-nude body that did not bear some mark of violence. She lay face up, moaning, her eyes half closed. But as all three men noted as they ran to her side, her expression was not one of horror or pain, but of ineffable *ecstasy;* of a wild, almost hysterical *happiness!* Her bruised lips moved once, uttering a single syllable, as Bob bent over her, his young face contorted with distress.

"Bell—?" he repeated. "What bell, darling? Oh, couldn't you ring for help? Who was it? How the devil did that . . . that fiend get in, whoever it was that. . . !" He whirled on the frightened desk clerk, then glared beyond them at the cluster of guests who hovered in the doorway. "Do something!" Bob grated. "Call the police! My . . . my wife has been. . . ." He left the ugly words mercifully unspoken, then turned to press Celia's hand to his cheek, cursing and crooning to her.

As he did so, the massive Babylonian ring slipped from her finger and rolled at his feet. A section of the hexagonal outer part fell open, and the young husband picked it up distractedly, staring at the concealed compartment. Inside, framed in a thin gold triangle, was a tiny piece of fabric that at first seemed to be silk, yellow silk, interwoven with a coarse dark thread.

Then Bob glanced up as the hotel doctor shoved his way into the room, firmly closing the door after him. Ordering all but the distraught bridegroom out into the hall, he bent over the half-conscious girl, who was now beginning to moan and toss in pain. His face was bleak as he turned on Bob, lips compressed.

"You did this?" he snapped coldly. "Young man, I certainly recommend psychiatric treatment—and an immediate annulment of your marriage!—if you . . . Veteran, are you? Sometimes, in delayed cases of combat fatigue——"

"Oh, stop it!" Bob ground out through his teeth. "I was down in the lobby! Somebody must have knocked after I left. And Celia opened the door, thinking it was I! It's a cinch nobody could have got in by way of the balcony!

THE medico stared at him, bewildered but unconvinced. He shook his graying head, shrugged helplessly, and tried to calm this pleasant-looking young man—who might or might not be a violent lunatic.

"All right, all right, boy. Take it easy. My name's Markham. I've been hotel doctor here for eighteen years, but nothing of this sort has ever——Tell me," he broke off, "was there some rival suitor who might have—? It's the work of a deranged person, obviously. A—a sex maniac, with marked sadistic tendencies. I don't recommend," he added gently, "that your wife be moved for a few days. She's . . . she's been very badly mauled. No serious injury; mostly shock. But—is there anyone you'd like me to notify?"

"No! Yes! My uncle, Walter Ferris, curator of the state museum," Bob blurted out distractedly, running a hand through his hair. "Oh, why, why did I leave her, even for a few minutes?" he groaned. "She just seemed to want a minute alone, like most brides. And I—I——"

The doctor laid a hand on his shoulder. "Of course," he said kindly, but with a wary look in his eyes. "Now, my boy, tell me—do you ever suffer from—intense headaches? Er—loss of memory? Recurrent nightmares, in which you——?"

Bob Hanson jerked up his head, glaring at him.

"Good lord!" he gasped. "You think *I* did this to poor Celia? That I'm a—a mental case, and just don't remember having. . . ? But I do remember!" he insisted helplessly. "We talked about the view, and having our dinner sent up. Then I . . . I went down after a pack of cigarettes, because Celia wanted to undress—"

"Yes," Dr. Markham said quietly. "But —the desk clerk tells me you were up here with your young bride for almost an hour, before you came down to the lobby alone. Looking rather nervous, one of the porters said." He smiled. "Of course, that's natural for a groom. Still——" The smile faded.

Bob gaped at him, his straightforward blue eyes flinching before the older man's expression.

"But I—I couldn't have! How could I?" He strode over to the doctor, and seized his shoulders as though they were the only solid things in the hotel room. "Doctor! I . . . was thrown from a pony once, as a child. I struck my head. Could that have. . . ?"

"It's possible," the physician nodded gently, then noted the raising agitation in the young man's face. "Now, now. We'll straighten this out later—you've had a terrible shock. Suppose you take the room next to mine for tonight, eh? In the morning we'll——Odd-looking ring you have there," he changed the subject smoothly in an effort to wipe some of the horror from the bridegroom's eyes. "Very ancient, isn't it? I collect ancient objects," he went on talking pleasantly. "Have a genuine scarab, from the tomb of Rameses. And a Mayan idol—hideous little thing. Mind if I look at that?"

Bob Hanson glanced down at his hand dully, which was still clutching the Babylonian ring his uncle had given his bride. The doctor took it from his nerveless grasp and turned it over and over, examining the tiny fragment of cloth-like stuff set in the secret compartment.

"By George!" he murmured. "Interesting! A hair ring! Early Babylonian, from the looks of that cuneiform inscription." He talked on in a low soothing tone, edging Bob Hanson from the room where his young bride lay, half-conscious and battered.

Skillfully he steered the stunned young man to a room opened by the porter. Bob sank down on the bed, gulping gratefully at the brandy flask that Markham held to his lips.

Then, once more, he buried his face in his hands.

"Celia!" he groaned. "Just a sweet innocent. Why, she's barely eighteen! I don't suppose she's even kissed more than a couple of boys in her life, at church picnics or the like! We grew up together. I—I wouldn't hurt her for anything in the world!"

THE doctor sighed. In contrast to the clean-cut young man on the bed, he looked tired and wrinkled, with sober dark eyes that had seen a great deal of human suffering. Also, he had seen a deal of criminal insanity, having been resident at a state asylum for several years. He eyed Bob warily, watching the way his fingers twisted together like writhing snakes.

"Don't worry," he soothed. "The house detective has been posted outside your wife's door. Nothing else can . . . harm her tonight. But I think it best that you sleep here, until some investigation of this . . . this business has been made. I'm sure," he added keenly, "that you would not want a recurrence, if it turns out that you *are* subject to attacks of schizophrenia. Split-personality, you understand. A Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde personality."

The young man groaned again, and shook his head violently. "But I'm *not!* I remember *everything!* Somebody must have forced entrance——"

"No. No, that's impossible, Mr. Hanson. I've already checked."

Bob looked up, startled by the cold gravity of the doctor's voice.

"No." The older man destroyed his last hope, as mercifully as he could. "A maid was mopping the hall outside your room, during the entire time you say you were in the lobby and your wife was alone. No one —*no intruder*—could have entered the room in your absence, without being seen by the maid. And it's obvious that no one could

gain entrance by way of that balcony. It's a drop of fifty feet—to the treetops!"

As his quiet words sank in, Bob's eyes widened in shock and incredulity. His neatly brushed head moved weakly from side to side in denial. Then, at the doctor's heavy shrug, he threw himself face down on the bed, his broad shoulders wracked by silent sobs.

"All right," he said brokenly. "Notify my uncle, please. He'll . . . take whatever steps you think necessary. Have me—committed, and send somebody to come and take Celia home."

About midnight, after young Hanson had drifted into a troubled sleep induced by strong sedatives, the doctor tiptoed from his room, carrying with him the heavy ring Bob had slipped from his bride's bruised hand.

DR. MARKHAM shook his head. It was a strange case, and a tragic one for everyone concerned. Ironically, he read the romantic inscription on the bride's betrothal ring, picking out the queer wedged-shaped symbols in a heavy tome on his desk. *"Mine through eternity. . . ."* The physician grunted. There seemed nothing he could do tomorrow except commit that nice young boy to a mental hospital, after first notifying their families of his brutal attack on his young bride.

Sighing, Markham sat down at his desk, idly examining the massive ring as he mulled over the problem. The metal was very dark, a weird *pulsing* black that seemed to expand and billow like smoke. Curiously he brushed a drop of acid across one of the six flat outer sides, and discovered it to contain some gold and iron, also another metal that defied his knowledge. Slipping open the secret compartment, the doctor stared for a moment at the tiny bit of fabric framed inside, with its fine silken woof and dark coarse warp.

On impulse, opening his penknife, he gouged out a strand of each, and placed them under his microscope. They were, as he suspected, hair—but a strange combination. The yellow silky strand was human hair, he found. But the dark coarse filament was that of some animal, perhaps a dog or an ape! Markham, who had expected the interwoven locks of some ancient lovers, was nonplussed at this discovery. He resolved to tell young Hanson about that in the morning—then reminded himself wryly that, in view of the events, that combination of human-and-beast hair in the betrothal ring was all too appropriate!

Then, abruptly, his eyes narrowed. A crazy idea had popped into his head, so fantastic that he dared not mention it to anyone.

Leaping up from his chair, the doctor mounted the stairs to the floor above and entered the room of the young bride, after nodding casually to the house detective who dozed outside the door, on guard. Markham sat down quietly by the bed, checking the girl's pulse and frowning over the bruises and welts on her neck and shoulders.

Then, carefully, he slipped the massive ring on her finger, and waited. He did not have to wait long.

Almost instantly, the girl's calm expression changed to one of feverish excitement, ecstasy mingled with fear, horror, and revulsion. She began to toss and mutter in her sleep, and Markham had to bend close to catch her words—an odd combination of English and what he recognized finally as Sumerian, the ancient language of Babylonia!

"Ai! Phogor!" the girl whimpered. "Come! *E-Im-Khur-sag* . . . the high places in the wind! The winding stair shall lift me up to . . . chammanim . . . *Ai! Bel-peor! Thy handmaiden . . . awaits thy . . . pleasure. . . .!"*

Celia cried out suddenly—and before Markham's startled eyes, a great red welt began to rise up on the flesh of her slim neck. Another appeared on her bare shoulder as she whimpered and cried out once more.

The doctor mopped his forehead, on which cold sweat had broken out. Dimly, though the night outside was still and clear, he thought he heard a rushing sound, as of a strong wind blowing. Through and beneath it, also, he heard a deep guttural voice, with the suggestion of words—

hideous, lecherous words that blasphemed the very air of the room. Markham gulped, and bending quickly, withdrew the ring from Celia's finger—the ring which already had contracted and made a deep imprint on her flesh.

"Good God!" the doctor breathed shakily. "I . . . I never thought I'd have the privilege of seeing a genuine case. Stigmata! Hysterical stigmata! No question of it. But what brought it on?"

HE RAN his fingers over the welts and and bruises on Celia's body, and pursed his lips in a soundless whistle of amazement. Some of the wounds were actually bleeding! And her fingernails, which had a moment before clawed frantically at the open air above her, were broken as though in struggle against some solid object. Looking closer at them, Markham opened his penknife and pried something out from beneath one nail. A hair! A dark coarse hair, exactly like that he had found in the ring! But perhaps Celia Hanson, too, had examined that secret compartment before her strange attack occurred.

Returning to his quarters, Dr. Markham sat for some time, poring over the big tomes in his library; reference works that pertained to his hobby of collecting ancient relics. Toward dawn he dozed off, his mind awhirl with strange conjectures—only to waken sharply with the feeling that someone was in his room.

Markham turned his head slightly where it rested on his desk. A hand was groping stealthily in the drawer near him, rummaging among his medicines. It selected a vial on the label of which a grinning skull warned of the dangerous contents.

The doctor leaped up, seizing the hand and knocking the bottle to the floor. With an expert twist, he forced young Bob Hanson into a chair and kicked the vial of poison out of reach under his bed. The boy glared at him hopelessly, slumped in his chair.

"Why did you stop me," he muttered, "after what I did? And it must have been I, if nobody else could get in that room! Oh, don't you see? I've got to release Celia! She'd wait for me. She'd try to forgive me, to understand. Don't you see it's the only way for us now?"

"Except," Markham interrupted crisply, "to look at the facts, and use a little common sense and imagination! Relax, boy," he said softly. "It wasn't you. I didn't see how it could be—you've no symptoms of mental disorder. But——"

Bob's eyes widened. He jumped up from his chair. "They've caught him? The—the man who——?"

"There was no man," Markham said, patting his shoulder. "My young friend, I have every reason to believe that your bride's wounds and bruises are—stigmatic. That is, induced by hysteria and self-hypnosis. It's a medical phenomenon you don't see once in a lifetime. Though there was a case in the papers recently, a Theresa Neumann, who repeats the wounds of Christ on the cross every Good Friday. There was another case in the village of Vilar Chao, Portugal, a girl named Amelia. A cross appeared on her forehead in a great red welt when she said her Rosary.

"There are other kinds of stigmata, though, besides those caused by religious fervor. There was a Polish girl, Eleanor Zugun, who would break out in welts and scratches when she believed a spirit-creature, a poltergeist, was attacking her. Her hands were tied and she was watched by a group of physicians, but the welts would appear just the same—dreadful raw red wounds on her cheek or neck."

Young Hanson blinked at him, utterly bewildered. "But," he blurted, "you don't mean that Celia—? Why, she's not the hysterical type! Are you saying now that she, not I, is the mental case?"

The gray-haired physician stared back at him, his own eyes dark with bewilderment.

"Perhaps," he said quietly, "my medical report will say that your young bride subconsciously feared marriage, though consciously she trusted and loved her new husband. Psychiatry! We scientists," he smiled wryly, "are willing to accept its strange ins and outs as medical fact. But—I personally believe," he added slowly, "that this is a *psychical* phenomenon. Mr. Hanson, I be-

lieve that, for the short period you left your wife alone in that room in her highly emotional state, she became hypersensitive to . . . what the American Society for Psychic Research calls *psychometry*!"

"Psy . . . ?" Bob Hanson repeated, amazed. "Say! I've heard of that! There were some recent tests made at Harvard in extra-sensory perception. It's the opposite of clairvoyance, isn't it? A psychometry medium can take some object in his hand and sense its past—or events that happened closely connected with the object?"

Markham nodded. "Precisely! I've observed one such medium in her—call it 'trance', if you like. A lady, a chubby palmist who plied her trade in a tent outside Miami. She was actually able to take a piece of ordinary brickbat in her hand—and describe the details of a murder committed with it! She even drew a clear picture of the murderer. He was later convicted of the crime—though not on such flimsy legal evidence as a psychometric reading! Our authorities are not inclined to credit these matters. But 'thoughts are things', as the saying goes. They impregnate metal and wood and stone, much as radio-active heat does in a certain area. Everyone can sense such waves at times, especially in moments of intense emotion. But some of us are more receptive than others, more intense.

"Mr. Hanson," the doctor finished flatly, "I believe your wife is such a person—and that she relived an experience strongly attached to this ancient Babylonian ring you gave her. You call it a bethrothal ring, and it is just that—but in a rather ghastly way."

The doctor shuddered visibly, then went on:

"I examined the cuneiform inscription very carefully. A sinister one, rather than romantic! Coupled with what your wife muttered in her sleep when I slipped the ring on her finger, I believe the thing to be the betrothal ring of a young bride of ancient Babylonia. A virgin bride of the city of Peor, on the Tigris.

"There was, as you may know, a religious custom among those who worshipped the god Baal—or Bel is the Babylonian word, meaning *lord* or *possessor*. An evil, vicious custom. Directly after a wedding the young bride was required to sit in the temple and give herself to the first stranger who tossed a handful of silver into her lap. She could not refuse to submit herself to the first comer—even if he happened to be a leprous beggar; Then, and only then, could the bride go to her lawful husband. A practice so unthinkable that the Canaanites came to speak of the god as 'shame-lord,' or '*Baal-ze-bub*', the 'god of flies'.

"The stranger, of course, represented Bel. A shaggy filthy monster with a beast's body and the old lewd face of a man. But sometimes, if the young bride was very fair and innocent, the god himself came to claim first fruits, as the practice was called."

Bob Hanson, listening intently, tugged at his collar as the import of Markham's words reached him all at once.

"And—Celia?" he forced out the name. "She—she—?"

". . . relived the experience of that young bride of Peor," the doctor nodded grimly. "By the medium of psychometry. A truly horrible experience! No wonder her physical body was affected, to the extent of stigmatic wounds! Of all the impious deities of antiquity, Bel, or Baal, was known and despised for his obscene brutality! Most of our Christian prophets preached against him, and burned down his temples—Daniel, Isaiah, Jeremiah. They weren't exaggerating when they called the rites of Bel an 'abomination'!"

Young Hanson shivered uncontrollably. "Oh, my poor Celia!" he moaned. "Of course, she'll have to be hospitalized. But I'll wait for her! I'll—I'll help her forget this terrible experience if it takes the rest of my life!"

Dr. Markham smiled, slapping him on the back gently.

"But it won't take that long," he said cheerfully. "Unless I'm much mistaken—" He glanced out the window to where the sun was rising, clear and warm, over the mountain ridge." In fact, I rather think your pretty bride is waking up right now, hungry for breakfast—and worried about

where you are. Shall we go up to see her?"

The young man nodded eagerly, and in a moment the two men were standing beside Celia's bed. She stared at Markham, pulling up the covers modestly over the torn negligee. Then, as he took her wrist with a faint smile, she relaxed, making a little face at Bob.

"Oh—you're a doctor? Good heavens! Did I faint or something last night? Poor Bob! He must have been frantic, to call in a . . ." She moaned faintly, sinking back on her pillow. "But I do feel awful! And those horrible nightmares—!" The bride's face convulsed with horror, then flushed to the roots of her hair. "It—it was that dog-thing I thought I saw at the wedding! Ugh! It—came to me, and—I was terrified, and yet—" She rolled her head from side to side as though in an effort to dispel the confused memory. "Oh, it's all mixed up!"

Bob moved quickly to the bedside, and she took his hand in both of hers, smiling shakily.

"Oh, darling," Celia apologized, "I didn't mean to frighten you. But I . . . I felt as though I'd been drugged! I couldn't wake up. Just kept on and on dreaming about this . . . this strange ancient-looking city! There was a crowd in the streets, around a great tall building. Some robed men were dancing in a sort of queer *limp*. Then. . ." She shuddered. "Then one of them snatched a poor little baby from its mother and . . . and dashed its brains out on a big six-sided stone! Oh, it was horrible! But I couldn't wake up . . ."

"Then a . . . a young girl, with a wreath of flowers on her head. I . . . It seemed to be *me*! There was a long flight of stone steps winding around the outside of that tall tower. I climbed and climbed, with those people howling below me. Then—there was a door opening. And a big room, lighted with a weird green glow; a room with simply dreadful pictures on the tiled walls! They . . . they made me blush! Then there was a huge couch, all gold and blue jewels, piled high with pillows. And the wind—it blew and howled all the time! Then I . . . I . . ."

Celia stopped, then plunged on, her breath coming in short gasps of horror.

"I . . . looked up, and that *Thing* was coming toward me, talking in a horrible guttural voice and . . . *and reaching for me!*"

SHE gave a little moan and buried her face in the pillow. Over her head. Bob Hanson looked despairingly at Dr. Markham. But the doctor shook his head. Lightly, he flipped back the cover to reveal the girl's bare shoulders and neck, which had been covered with such dreadful bruises.

Young Hanson stared, unbelieving. The wounds had disappeared! He raised his eyes once more to Markham's, lips parted. But again the wise old physician shook his head, moving unostentatiously toward the door.

"We are all troubled by nightmares and nervousness," he said soothingly. "I wouldn't be upset by it, young lady. Just take it easy for a few days—and enjoy your honeymoon! You'll be fine as soon as you and this anxious young man of yours have had breakfast together! I'll drop in later. Much later!"

He closed the door after him, smiling, and strode down the hall to return to his own quarters. The ring, the evil ring of Bel-peor, was still in his pocket—to be mailed back to Walter Ferris with the full story, at young Hanson's request. Bob could pretend to have lost it. Anything, so that it would never again close, vise-like, about his bride's slim finger—as it had closed about the finger of that other young bride of Peor, many centuries before Christ.

Markham frowned. There was much about this case that he did not understand—and much that he did not care to understand! That dark coarse hair in the secret compartment of the ring, for instance—with its counterpart under Celia's fingernail. That could be explained, perhaps, in a natural way——

But he could not explain the fact that the silky blond strands interwoven with it were, under his microscope, identical to the hair on Celia Hanson's head—though it had been set into that ancient Babylonian ring over three thousand years ago!

IT WAS ONCE BELIEVED THAT AFTER DEATH, SOULS IN THE POWER OF THE DEVIL WERE RETURNED TO EARTH AS APPARITIONS TO SOLICIT SOULS FOR THE EVIL ONE. THEY WERE ECTOPLASMIC THINGS - TRANSPARENT & WISPY BUT NOT OBNOXIOUS. THEY RATTLED NO CHAINS NOR HAUNTED HOUSES. RATHER THEY WERE PLEASANT & GIFTED WITH CHARM - THE EASIER TO LURE UNFORTUNATES IN THE PATH OF THE DEVIL. ONE FORM OF SEDUCTION WAS THAT OF GIVING TO UGLY, DEFORMED FEMALES GREAT BEAUTY AS WELL AS THE POWERS OF PROPHECY & HEALING. SOME OF THESE WOMEN GAINED ENVIABLE POSITIONS IN STATE AFFAIRS & WERE HIGHLY ACCLAIMED IN THE ARTS OF THE PHYSICIAN. IN RETURN THEY PLIGHTED THEIR TROTH WITH THE DEVIL, RENOUNCED THEIR CHURCH AFFILIATIONS & AT DEATH THEIR SOULS DESCENDED TO THE REGIONS OF DARKNESS.

# The Invisible Reweaver

BY MARGARET ST. CLAIR

*". . . I spin, but there are broken threads—and so men die!"*

"SIT DOWN, you fool," he said sharply. "Do you want to be drowned?"

I looked at him in astonishment. The boat was almost as motionless as if it had been drawn up on the beach. There was not a ripple, not even a swell, on the flat surface of the sea. It was so calm that standing on your head on the roof of the cabin where Captain Saunders was dealing out cut bait to the anglers would have been perfectly safe. It was a beautiful day.

Heading by Matt Fox

My surprise must have appeared in my face. His mouth contracted in a nervous grimace. He said, though not in an apologetic tone, "You never can tell. There are a lot of accidents these days."

"There always are a lot of accidents," I answered. He didn't look over thirty-five.

"I suppose so." He turned back to his rod. I noticed the abnormally cautious stance he had adopted for fishing. After a second he said—he seemed to be talking to me out of nervousness, rather than garrulity—"There are a lot of accidents, though. The papers are full of them." He had a rather strident voice.

"Um."

"I'll show you what I mean." He reeled in his line quickly; I got the impression that he was glad to abandon fishing even temporarily. "Here."

He pulled a folded paper from the pocket of his brown corduroy jacket and pointed at a headline: "Forty Killed in Freak Plane Crash."

I'd seen that headline already. My cousin Max, of whom I had been quite fond, was among those reported dead in the accident. "There are plane wrecks almost every day," I said.

"But this was a freak accident. It shouldn't have happened. And besides. . . ." He folded the paper to the third page and pointed to another headline: "Brake Failure Dooms Twenty One on Crack Train."

"See what the engineer says about it?" he asked. He began to read aloud from the column. " 'I don't know how it happened. The brakes had just been tested. I can't account for it.'

"And here's another piece." He riffled throught the newprint and read, with what struck me as ghoulish relish, " 'Explosion Kills Mother, Child. Mrs. J. J. Harris and her four month old son were killed today when a bottle of non-explosive cleaning fluid apparently exploded. According to neighbors Mrs. Harris often did home dry cleaning. . . .'

"See what I mean? The cleaner was non-explosive. And yet it exploded. It shouldn't have. But it did."

"Accidents will happen," I answered. I was getting tired of him. I'd come out in Saunders' boat to fish, not to talk.

"Will they? And there's another item, one on the back page. It's about a man who fell on a piece of glass and severed an artery. He bled to death before the ambulance could get there."

An angler on the other side of the boat let out a shrill yip. He'd hooked something. It might have been a tuna; the boat began to dip and sway.

"See what I was driving at?" my interlocutor said with an air of sour triumph. "If you'd been standing up then, leaning over the side—boof! You'd have gone overboard."

"No, I wouldn't," I contradicted, rather surlily. "I never heard of anybody going overboard for anything like that. It would have been sheer bad luck."

"That's what I've been trying to tell you. Nowadays, everybody has bad luck.

"People take chances, little chances. Half the time they aren't even real chances, like the woman who was using the cleaning fluid. But something goes wrong, something that shouldn't have. And then there are more headlines in the newspapers."

He was, I perceived with resignation, determined to talk. I reeled in my own line, frowning with annoyance, and turned to him. "I suppose you have some sort of theory as to what's causing it," I said.

"Oh, a theory!" He was silent for so long that I made a tentative movement toward my reel. Then he cleared his throat.

"Look here, I'll tell you about it. You can judge for yourself whether it's my fault. Even if you don't believe me, you may find it interesting."

I don't know what I'd been expecting—a wild-eyed outpouring about sunspots, perhaps. But what he actually began talking about was his employment experiences.

HE HADN'T had much training in his specialty—something to do with commercial bookbinding—when he was drafted. After he got out of the army he had trouble finding a job, and when he did get one it only lasted a couple of months. He'd been on the point of applying for more

training under the G.I. bill when his girl friend—"I had a girl friend, then," he said nostalgically—burned a hole in her best tweed suit. She took it to one of these invisible reweaving places to get it fixed.

"The job they did was just beautiful," my vis-a-vis said. "Neither Phyllis nor I could locate where the hole had been. They charged her a nice price for it, too. And I got to thinking, why shouldn't I start myself a little business like this?

"From what Phyllis said, the man who rewove her suit didn't have a lot of equipment. It wasn't at all like a commercial bookbindery. I'd always wanted to go into business for myself. And the beautiful job the reweaver had done appealed to me.

"I went through the ads in the papers. There were two or three reweaving schools. I don't know what led me to pick the one I did. They can't all be like it was. The ad was headed, 'Make Yourself An Invisible Reweaver.' I didn't realize then what it meant."

HIS face, now that he was talking, had smoothed out and relaxed, and I saw that he was considerably younger than my previous estimate. He was around twenty-seven or twenty-eight. He was calmer and more self-assured, too, than he'd been before.

"Anyhow, I went around to the school," he went on. "It was just a place like any other place, with a little office in front and a man sitting at a desk. He was the registrar.

"He was a perfectly ordinary man. I saw him maybe fifty times, and I don't even remember what color his eyes were. He took my application, and I found out that the school wasn't G.I. approved. That ought to have put me on my guard. But he explained it by saying that the course cost so little that it just wasn't worthwhile to get a loan for it.

"He showed me samples of the work the school's pupils had done. When he showed you where to look you could see, just barely, that there had been a hole or tear there once. It was mighty fine work.

"It sounded good to me. The registrar began asking me about my war record. I had a pretty good record. I got three citations for, you know, things.

"When he heard about the citations, he began smiling. 'We like to help vets,' he said, still smiling. 'And a man with your record deserves all our help. I'll be glad to give you our complete training at half price.'

"He named the sum, and it was pretty trifling. I was pleased. I said, 'How about equipment?'

"'You won't need much,' he answered, still very cordial. 'We'll furnish most of it.'

"He took me in back to where the school was. Two or three other people were mending things on machines. The teacher came up, and he introduced us. Her name was Parks. She was a big fat woman with small hands. She moved quick, for all her size, and I never heard a woman with a prettier voice.

"I'd been expecting she'd start teaching me on one of the machines, but she didn't. She took me on past the big room to a little one where there was a sort of frame. She said I'd begin by learning to mend individual threads.

"There were broken threads on the frame, and what I had to do was to rejoin them. She showed me how to do it, with a sort of pull and twist. They were all woolen threads.

"After a couple of hours practice, I was pretty good at it. She said I was making good progress. Then she touched a switch and the threads began to move past me. They didn't move fast, but they were in motion. It was a lot harder to join them then.

"I worked at mending the moving threads on the frame for about three days. I got so efficient I never missed a single one. Then the teacher speeded the frame up.

"By the time I'd been going to school for four weeks, the threads were just whizzing past. I wouldn't have thought you'd be able to see them, let alone join them, when they went that quick. The teacher kept telling me how good I was, and I guess I thought so too. Anyhow . . ."

HE FELL silent "Go on," I prodded him. Two men on my side of the boat were hauling in bonita, and an angler on the other side had landed three. I wanted his story done with, so I could fish.

"I was just wondering why I didn't ask any questions. Whatever she was teaching me to do on that frame, it didn't seem like ordinary reweaving, even at the time. But you know how it is with a teacher—you sort of think they must know their stuff. And besides, she had such a pretty voice.

"Along in the fifth week she said I was ready for something different. She paid me a lot of compliments and mentioned my war record, though I didn't see, then, what it had to do with it.

"She took me down in the elevator to the basement. I never saw such a big basement. We walked and walked. And little by little I saw we weren't in the basement any more, but in a big, shadowy place.

"That sounds like a cave or something, but it wasn't. There weren't any limits to this space. I don't know where the shadows were coming from. But it was big, bigger than anything anybody could think of. It was like the space between the stars.

"All the time we'd been walking along Miss Parks had been talking to me. I don't remember what she said, but it was nice to listen to, like your mother singing to you when you're a kid. But now I began to feel a little frightened. I said, 'What's all this? Where are you taking me?'

"She said, 'Do not be frightened. You have been chosen to help us. It is a great honor. You must try to be worthy of it.'

"Her answer didn't make me feel any calmer. But I was ashamed to let her see that I was nervous. She'd talked so much about my war record, you see. Besides, I was curious. But I guess the real reason I didn't try to make a break for it was that she had such a pretty voice.

"We kept on walking. Miss Parks didn't say anything more. And pretty soon I saw two great big shadows up ahead of us.

"For all their size, they looked familiar, like something I was acquainted with. I stared at them and tried to think. All of a sudden it dawned on me. They were the shapes of two women, as tall as the pyramids, made out of shadow and night."

He was showing an unexpected talent for the right, the evocative, phrase. And what an imagination! I was almost glad I had abandoned my fishing to listen to him. "Go on," I said urgently.

He looked at me sideways. His eyes were gray and a little bloodshot. "I was afraid you might think I was . . . exaggerating," he said.

IT TOOK him a moment to get back into the mood of his story. He cleared his throat and coughed a couple of times. "When I got up to the shadows, I was just as far away from them as ever. I know that sounds funny, but that's the way it was. I looked around, and Miss Parks wasn't anywhere near me. What had happened to her? My heart began to thump. I felt lost and alone. And then I saw there were three big shadows now.

"Way up over my head a voice—it sounded like the deep notes of an organ, but I think it was Miss Parks speaking—a voice said, 'Sister, how goes the work?'

"There was a pause, and then the answer. 'I spin. But there are broken threads.'

"It's hard to describe how those voices made me feel. It wasn't fear, exactly. It was like what you feel inside a big cathedral, when you look up at the dome and see the buttresses rushing up, and up, and up.

"A hand came down out of the shadow and lifted me. I could hardly feel where it was touching me, but I went flying through the air. My hair blew back from the motion. And then I was set down beside a loom, the biggest loom. And I knew what Miss Parks had brought me there for. I was supposed to reweave the broken threads.

"A design was being formed on the loom. I could see that, though the design was too big for my eyes to comprehend. Now and then one of the threads would run out, and the big hand that had picked me up would join a thread of another color to it. That was the way it was supposed to

be, to make the design. But sometimes one of the threads would break, before it had run out. And it was those threads I was supposed to mend.

"When I realized that, I felt much better. It was not knowing what it was all about that had bothered me before. And I could see that it was a great honor, just as Miss Parks had said, to be chosen for a job like that.

"One of the threads broke. I hurried toward it, to join it again. It was high up in the work, and when I got there I found I had to stretch out over a—over nothing, to mend it. Do you understand what I mean? There was nothing between me and all that space besides frail-looking threads. I looked over and out, and it seemed to me I could see points of light that were probably stars shining between the threads. Falling—falling has always been my worst fear."

He halted and pulled absently at his knuckles. I heard them crack as the joints snapped back into place. "What happened then?" I prompted. "Did you mend the thread?"

"I tried to. I honestly tried to. I knew how important it was, and I stretched out after it. And then I found . . . I found I couldn't see my arms or body or hands. I was invisible.

"Bravery is a funny thing. Sometimes you're so frightened you can't stand it, and your fear makes you do something desperate. It looks like bravery, and I guess maybe it is. I was that way in combat. This wasn't like that at all. This was different.

"I stood there shaking and trying to make myself reach out and mend that thread for maybe a minute. You understand, I had every intention of doing it. It was just that my body wouldn't let me. All of a sudden—and I didn't want to—all of a sudden I turned and ran.

"I ran away from the loom and past the big shadows. I don't know what I stepped on or how I kept from falling. I didn't think about that. The way I was feeling, it would have been a relief to me to fall and get it over with.

"I ran and ran. In the back of my mind I was afraid that one of the big shadows would pick me up and set me down beside the loom again. But nothing happened. There wasn't even a sound from those big shadowy shapes. I guess they thought I wasn't worth bothering about."

The sky had clouded over a little; the boat was rocking gently. He seemed to think his story was finished. "How did you get out? Get back here?" I asked finally.

"I don't know. I mean, I don't remember. I ran for a long time, and then I walked. After that the next thing I remember is the janitor, a man in green coveralls, asking me how I'd got into the basement and what I was doing there. He was annoyed and perplexed. I wasn't in the basement of the school, you see—I was in the basement at Bracey's department store.

"But now you see why there are so many accidents. When one of the threads breaks before its time, there's nobody to rejoin it. And there'll keep on being accidents until Miss Parks trains somebody else to be an invisible reweaver so he can rejoin those threads."

THE three fates, the spinners or weavers whose threads represent the lives of men, appear in the folklore of many nations. The Scandinavian peoples called them the Norns, the Greeks called them the Moirae. The Romans knew them as the Parcae; "Miss Parks" seemed a pretty fair anglicization of this. Still. . . . "You mean you're responsible for all the accidents?" I demanded.

"Yes." He tapped on the folded newspaper in his jacket pocket. "All those people killed in the air crash—it's my fault. You could say I murdered them."

I don't know whether or not I believed him. I'd been fond of my cousin Max, but it was a hard story to accept. But when the man in the brown corduroy jacket tapped the paper and said, "You could say I murdered them," there was a look on his face, a look of self-importance, almost of pride, that made me feel suddenly that I hated him. Involuntarily I made a movement toward him.

He drew back. He looked more startled than surprised. And then—I don't know how it happened—he went over the side of the boat.

FOR a moment he floundered and sputtered and splashed in the water. His face had gone white. There were shouts of surprise from the others. People ran toward our side of the boat .

I couldn't reach him; he was too far away. I reversed my rod and held out the butt end for him to grasp. He stretched for it. And then one of the fishing lines near him wrapped itself purposefully around his throat.

The man whose line it was said afterwards that he must have hooked a tuna just at that moment and that the fish must have swerved in a circle and then headed toward the bottom. Maybe. What it looked like from the boat was that the line had decided of its own volition to murder the man who had failed at reweaving invisibly.

The brown corduroy jacket receded through the water. The man in it dwindled through layer after layer of green. His mouth looked extremely surprised.

We weren't equipped to fish for people. The Coast Guard had to come out to help us. When we finally raised him, the invisible reweaver was quite dead. The newspaper was still in the pocket of his brown corduroy coat.

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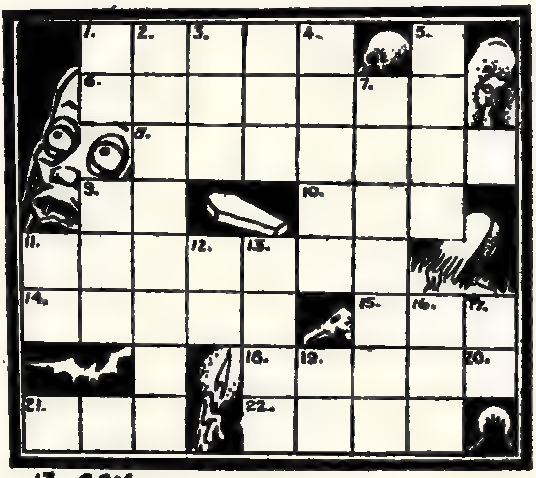
# Weird Crossword



**across**

1. DISEMBODIED SPIRIT
6. DISMAY
8. CANNOT BE EXPLAINED
9. YES (SP.)
10. ISLAND PORT (N.G.)
11. SATAN
14. WHAT WEIRD TALES MAKES TINGLE
15. ENEMY
18. HEAD
21. FAMOUS AUTHOR OF WEIRD STORIES
22. PAST TENSE OF TELL

**down**

2. KILLING
3. CONTAINING ORE
4. DESIGNATION
5. WOOD ON WHICH A DEAD BODY IS BURNED
7. TERROR
9. EAT
12. WITHIN
13. GAY
16. ANCIENT
17. FIRST LETTER OF NAME OF FANTASY MASTER
19. BEST STORY IN AN ISSUE

SOLUTION IS ON PAGE 88

# Blue Peter

*BY MURRAY SANFORD*

**Heading by Vincent Napoli**

DIDN'T the whole business begin, then, on New Year's Eve in this same bar of Tim Rafferty's, many years ago before the war, and the boys packed in for a drop of something to keep out the cold? All the more because Peter Corrigan was home after three years in

*Set one curse to catch another!*

Chicago, with a pocket full of dollars and the fingers of him itching to spend them.

The great bucko was Peter that night, airing the Yankee way of talk he'd picked up in his spell as a Chicago policeman, and the rest (except meself, that's been off and on in the States) not understanding the half of it. But sure, they could understand a round of drinks, and Peter was free enough with his invitations.

Devil knows who started the witch-talk. Before you could speak the whole room was disputing. Some declared there was no such thing. Others that witches were unchancy creatures and not to be crossed or denied. Wasn't there Biddy Magee, living but two miles over the hill, could put the evil eye on you for a wrong word?

Peter called them for a pack of ignorant hayseeds. You can't be a copper in Chicago and swallow such rubbish, said he. Witches? Baloney! Nix on the witches!

"Ould Nick's ye mean," chuckled Paddy Regan, who's the one for his joke. Then he winked to the rest of us. "I never saw ye nearer to Biddy's house than throwin' stones at it, for the matter of that," he said with a grin. "An' I'll bet ye a bottle of Tim Rafferty's best whiskey ye won't visit the same Biddy this night, to hear your fortune read."

Glory be! Wasn't the fat in the fire, then. We had the drink in, Peter and all, and he rared up at once. What, him, who'd walked among blazing tommy-guns, and shot down gangsters, afraid of poor ould Biddy Magee? Sure, and he'd take Paddy Regan's bet, and be glad to share the bottle of whiskey with his friends. Of course, and he'd go to Biddy's right away!

And with that, he stalked out from the bar, and into the snow that was still falling.

Biddy lived, as I told you, nearly two miles away, as ugly an old harridan as ever ye saw. Peter, with the whiskey warming him, marched along brave enough for a while, the snow in his face, but soon he was beginning to curse the quick temper that was in him and brought him from the warm bar on such a stupid errand. An uneasy road, across the hill and down along the bog to Biddy Magee's, and never a soul on the way. He was glad enough to see the light of the botheen and at last he knocked on the door.

"Come ye in, Peter Corrigan," cried Biddy. For all his big talk, Peter felt the creeps come in his spine, for how in the world did she know it was him, and it so dark. She must have the two sights, and that was an unchancy thing.

HE WENT in and shut the door against the snow. Biddy was sitting beside a fire of peats, stirring a pot in the candlelight and grinning at him with half the teeth of her missing. At her feet was a great brute of a cat, staring with green eyes that put a shiver through Peter.

"Heh! heh! The fine upstanding young fellow it is, come to keep old Biddy company," she cackled. "Now what would brave Peter Corrigan want with an ould witch, to walk across the hill in the middle of the snow? Heh! Heh!"

Peter didn't like the tone of her, nor her teasing.

"Cut out the kiddin'," he growled. "I'm come for me fortune, and if it's to be wisecracking ye are, then I'll hit the trail."

You never saw the sudden rage that Biddy flew into, when he spoke in his Yankee slang. Glaring, she was, with eyes as green as the cat's, and spluttering with anger.

"Divil fly away wid ye!" she screamed. "Speak the mother's tongue ye learned, or get out of me house wid your outlandish talk."

For a second Peter's temper matched her own, and he glared back. Then he remembered his bet with Paddy Regan, and the fool he would look if he went back and said he'd come all this way and Biddy hadn't read his fortune.

"Sure, then, it was a slip," he buttered the old one, "and it's sorry I am if I offended ye. Come ye, Mistress Biddy, will ye not kindly tell me fortune?"

She gave him the suspicious look, but quietened.

"Ye'll cross me hand wid silver, mind," said she. "All right, then. Sit down on this stool and let me be studying your palm."

SHE was so long at it, muttering and shaking her head, that Peter got impatient, wriggling on the stool and tapping the floor with his foot. Then she gave him the queer, sideways quirk with her eyes.

"Saints have mercy!" she said. "Never have I seen the like. Fortune, an' sudden death all mixed up in it. Fortune, by the wagging tongue that's in ye, and death at the end of it, through the same clattering tongue—Wirra! Now cross me hand with silver, an' go quickly, for 'tis Biddy Magee doesn't like what she's read this night." And she shivered, and drew close her shawl.

Peter listened to her with his mouth open, then snapped it shut. Of all the pack of nonsense, thought he. Well, he would get his own back on the old witch that she was. So he fished in his pocket and took out half a crown.

"Will half a dollar be enough to cross your dirty hand?" he said. Biddy held out her fist to take it, but Peter grabbed the fist, opened it, drew the half-crown over her palm one way and then the other, and put the money back in his pocket.

"That's crossin' it with silver for you!" he chuckled, and was at the door before she could get her breath.

Biddy fair screeched with rage.

"Ye black-hearted, swindlin' shame on the mother that bore ye! A curse on your lyin' tongue! A curse——" All suddenly she was quiet again. "A curse," she muttered. "'Tis that was in his hand." Then she screeched louder than ever. "Cheat an ould woman, would ye? Twist the decent speech of your fathers into outlandish blatherings? A curse is on every word ye misuse an' turn into horrid foreign gibberish. A year an' a day the curse will haunt ye, an' your own words will bring ye ruin."

There was a roar of laughter from Peter, standing in the doorway fit to hurt his sides.

"Ho! ho! Are ye trying to put a jinx on Peter Corrigan?" he told her. "I'll give ye another curse—when ye're able to make that one stick, then the whole mountainside will fall on this two-bit shack." And with that, while Biddy screeched to split your ears, he slammed the door and away into the night.

I'll not weary you with his adventures before he got back to Tim Rafferty's. The snow was so thick, he missed his way and fell into a drift. Half an hour he wallowed, and when he won clear, he found he'd lost his wallet. Worse still, he'd also lost his directions. Back and forward he tramped, cursing Paddy Regan, cursing Biddy Magee, and cursing himself for a fool. The dawn was coming when he at last found himself near to the village, and Tim Rafferty was lighting the morning fire when he came in.

"Where have ye been, all night?" cried Tim. "Lost your way? Here, I'll get ye a drop of spirits. Ye're blue with cold, man."

He brought a stiff glass of whiskey.

"Blue, is it?" Peter cried when he had swallowed it. "You're darn tootin'! Crazy bets, an' losing me wallet with half me cash in it, an' traipsin' the hills all night! I'm blue as a buzz-fly, if I'm nothing else!"

With that he went upstairs, threw off his clothes, and slept like a dead one.

IT WAS the middle of the day when he woke with the shivers. He put on a clean shirt and dry trousers and jacket, and came down for a drink to warm him. There were some of the boys in the bar, who wished him a Happy New Year and were hardly finished speaking when they all gave him the queer stare.

"Sure, it's meself all right," laughed Peter. "Ye can stand me a drink and I'll tell you of me adventures last night, and how I crossed Biddy Magee's palm with silver." But they kept staring with never a word, so he looked in the mirror behind the bar.

"Holy Mike!" cried Peter. The face of him, and his neck, and his hands, and his arms clear to the elbow where the shirt came, were blue. Not with the cold. No, blue and shining like the steel of a pistol barrel.

He rubbed his face with his sleeve. No difference at all. He rubbed harder, but he might as well have been trying to clean the color from that same pistol.

"Here, try this," said Tim, giving him a rag with spirits on it. But there was nothing would take off the blue that was in his skin.

"Bedad!" chuckled Tim. "Ye said ye were blue as a buzz-fly, whatever that would be, but——"

"Thunder an' corpses!" howled Peter. " 'Tis that ould hag Biddy Magee has done this to me." For he had just remembered the curse that she had talked of, and saw in a flash what Biddy was meaning. Out he came with the whole story, vowing that if the old witch didn't call off her curse he would choke out the life of her. And a buzz-fly was the same as a bluebottle, he told us.

By the powers, and he didn't waste any time. Upstairs for his topcoat and boots. Down again and out the door in a towering rage, and off to Biddy Magee's with the rest of us trailing after. Through the snow to the top of the hill we skedaddled behind him. When he reached the top he stopped all suddenly and stood staring. One by one we caught up, and didn't every mother's son of us stand and stare, too. Glory be! What was become of Biddy's house, down there and along past the bog?

Don't be asking me if it was a curse, or if the snow was too heavy on the hill side, but half the mountain had slid down over the botheen and not a trace of it to be seen for black earth.

"Save us!" gasped Paddy Regan. "It's gone, Biddy an' all!"

"Howly heaven!" whispered Peter. " 'Tis —'tis the curse I put on her last night meself," and he gaped at the sight it was. "Well I'll be dumb as a mule!" cried he in amazement, and that was as far as he got with whatever he would have been saying next.

His lips were moving, but never a word came. He tried with all his might to speak, breathing hard and his eyes all screwed up. Then he gave a terrible howl and charged down the hill again, back to Tim Rafferty's with the rest of us at his tail and the fear of Biddy Magee giving us wings.

The discussing and advising we had, in Tim's bar while the drinks went down our throats to drive out the queasiness that was in us! The end of it was that we all took Peter to the doctor, who was not well pleased to be bothered with patients on New Year's Day, but near fell over himself when he saw the color that was in Peter. He had never seen the like, said he. We told him of Biddy's curse and the words Peter had spoke about buzz-flies, but he wouldn't be listening to such nonsense, he said. It must be something Peter had eaten or that he had drunk. And as for Peter losing his tongue, it was not uncommon for the vocal chords to be paralyzed with a shock—and more scientific discoursing like that.

But when Peter was the same next day, and nothing wrong with him excepting that he was blue and couldn't speak, the doctor was sending him to Dublin for the professors to examine him. Peter shook his head at the first and created in a temper, but the doctor said he would be paying the fare out of his own pocket, and unless Peter went, then he might never be getting rid of the blue in his skin or having back his speech.

SO TO Dublin went Peter, and one of us with him to look after him, since he couldn't speak a word. Begob! You never saw such an arguing and discussing, with the professors falling all over each other with excitement. One long drink of water said it must be tattooing. And where are the punctures, then, cried another. It's some kind of infection, says a third. And it's nothing of the kind, cries another, but congenital this-and-that.

Peter's friend told them of the curse, but devil the attention he got, and devil a bit of good did the whole pack of them do for Peter. They took specimens of his blood, and set Peter to howling with rage when one of them sliced off a bit of his skin when he wasn't looking. At last Peter stamped out in a rage, his friend after him, and they went back to their hotel.

Now the friend that was with him was a bright boyo, with brains in his upper story. He'd been puzzling all the time, to try and see couldn't an honest bit of cash be made out of Peter's misfortune. And a scheme had come to him, so he told it to Peter. If they could only lay hands on enough money to get the two of them to New York, and then——

Wisha! It happened just like his friend

said. To New York they went, and never a side-show like it, in any circus up and down the length of the States. "The Blue Man from Burma," they called it. Peter in a great cage with thick bars that would hold a tiger, and him bare except for a cloth round his middle. Every now and then he would leap at the bars, grab hold on them and shake them like a crazy one, howling all the while like a wild bull. Small wonder the folk came crowding to pay their ten cents.

Gape! They came in thousands. Then a newspaper boyo smelled a story, and wrote all about the Blue Man from Burma in his paper. There were letters came flocking in, declaring it must be a fake. University professors, and doctors of all kinds, must be investigating. Which the friend let them do, him in the cage also, to keep the wild man peaceful while they were about their rubbings and scrubbings, and testings and demanding bits of Peter's skin. And not a one of them could be saying where the blue came from.

Sure, wasn't it the grand publicity for nothing, and every town they came to was burning with excitement to pay ten cents and stare at Peter. The price was raised to fifteen cents, and then to a quarter, but still there was always a pack round the cage, with the cash rolling in. Easy money!

In two months there was more than enough dough to buy a truck. It was no joke for Peter, you'll understand, sleeping on straw in a cage bumping on the railroad. But hid away in the truck he could have a bed, and what he fancied for his dinner, and maybe a drop of beer, without anyone to be seeing. They made the truck with sides that could be lifted off, so that they didn't have to move the cage but just stop the truck where they were to be showing the Blue Man from Burma.

And they hired a driver, a boy from Connemara. Of course, he had to be let into the secret that Peter was no wild man, but just an unfortunate that was bewitched and trying to earn a few dollars from his misfortune.

"Well, I'll be drowned in a tub!" exclaims O'Reilly when he heard it. "Sure, 'tis all one to me, and good pay. I won't split, ye can depend on me for that."

HE NEVER finished staring at Peter, all the same, and smacking his leg with a "Well, I'll be drowned in a tub!" and no great variety to him. So that after a week of hearing him, Peter wrote on the slate that his friend had bought that O'Reilly must be sacked, or make him stop his infernal "I'll be drowned."

For Peter had become nervous as a cat of any slang. So his friend told O'Reilly to cut it out, which he did, excepting when he forgot—and then it was Peter got into a fury!

All over the States they travelled, from Maine to New Mexico and Minnesota to Miami. Big towns, hick towns, villages and country fairs. Peter and his friend were to split fifty-fifty, with a bonus to O'Reilly, and the dollars piled up every month. It was precious little Peter could be spending, of course, and in six months his share was five thousand dollars, in nine months it had rose to eleven.

When New Year's Eve was come again, they were in a fairground outside Denver City, and Peter had nearly sixteen thousand dollars to his name.

"Another year like this one," said his friend, when he had finished counting the takings at the end of the day, "and it's buying estates in Old Ireland we'll be, and live like lords."

In the morning he went into the truck before daylight, to take away Peter's bed and give him breakfast before O'Reilly helped him take down the sides. Peter yawned and threw off his pajamas, to put on the cloth that covered his middle. His friend had come back with a tray and a bit of a table to put it on, shining his torch to see where to put it. The torch fell on Peter, just getting on his dressing gown, for it was cold so early.

"Jumping snakes! Peter, what's happened to yourself?" cried his friend, shining the torch full on Peter's legs and chest.

Peter looked down. He gave a queer gurgle. All the blue was gone and he was white as you or me.

They stared at each other for a minute. Then Peter grabbed his slate. "A year and a day," he scribbled. It was a second or two before his friend saw what he was at.

"By the saints, we'll have to get out of here at once!" he cried, thinking quick. "They'll be tearing us to pieces if they see you all white and take it in their heads you're a fake."

He jumped from the cage, threw in the bed again, and told O'Reilly to pack up and get moving or they'd all be dead ones. Never mind the tent! Never mind anything except the suitcases, and he'd tell O'Reilly what it was all about when they were going.

IT WAS near noon when they stopped outside a small town that was on the railway.

"The truck's yours, O'Reilly, and here's five hundred dollars to be holding your tongue," said Peter's friend. With their suitcases the two of them made for the town and the railway, and took tickets for the East. In the train Peter's friend fell to groaning and bemoaning at the bad luck of it, and what a fortune they had lost because the curse was after lifting and turning Peter white again, and such-like waste of breath.

Peter sat in his corner, more and more irritated. Then he got up and made for the saloon, glad to be dressed like a decent human creature again. But he remembered he had no money, so back he had to go again. He poked his head in at the door of their private compartment.

"Here, hand over some of the cash. I'm wantin' a drink," he said. His jaw dropped. He gaped with his mouth open. "Did—did ye hear me?" he cried. "Holy Mike! I can—me tongue is—Glory be! I can speak again!" And then, before he had time to be thinking in his excitement and amazement, "Well, I'll be drowned in a tub!" exclaimed Peter.

He clapped his hand to his mouth, with his eyes rolling.

"Ochone! Wirra the day!" he lamented. "Now I have as good as killed meself! Death at the end of it, said Biddy Magee, and here's Peter Corrigan as good as drowned!"

Down he plumped himself in his seat, head in his hands and groaning like a demented one. No matter what his friend said, that the curse was for a year and a day and was finished now, no comfort or sense came to Peter again. The sight of a tub was enough to set him running like a mad one the other way. Even a bath he would not go into, saying there was plenty that called it taking their tub, and maybe Biddy would have it that way, so he would never wash himself except in a shower.

His friend got tired listening to the complaints and the groaning all day and all night. They left each other.

Yes indeed, sir, you're right. Peter Corrigan is dead. He set off from New York to go to South America, in an old tub of a fruit ship——Ach, then! I've let the cat out of the bag.

Thank ye, I'll have just one last one. Sure, the old tub sank. Caught in a hurricane in the Caribbean, and down to Davy Jones with all hands.

**Black magic!**

A dead man's hand, supercharged with hate, can it reach down the ages?

**"The Hand of Saint Ury"**

**by GORDON MacCREAGH**

*In the next WEIRD TALES*

*. . . no such thing as a ghost anyway, and how could one see part of something that wasn't.*

# They Worked the Oracle

***BY H. S. W. CHIBBETT***

ADA MORTON refilled her husband's cup. "Drink it up, Alan, and I'll try to squeeze you out a third."

She gestured towards a Sunday newspaper on the sideboard. "If only we could win a big prize in a radio contest. The Stanmores down the road won over a thousand dollars the other week, and—"

Alan did not reply. Ada looked at him sharply.

"Why, Alan—what's the matter? Are you ill?"

Her apprehensions were justified, for her husband was staring in stupefaction at something he had just seen over and beyond the ample form of his wife. Above the mantelpiece in fact. His mouth fell open, and his unfolded evening paper fell from his nerveless fingers.

"I—I . . . look there . . . behind you!"

His whispered words barely made themselves articulate.

His spouse whipped round with unaccustomed celerity, for Alan's facial expression had been sufficiently alarming.

"Why—what—" She turned again to her husband. Are you trying to be funny? Because if so, it doesn't suit you. There's nothing there, and you're acting as though you saw a ghost—"

"I d-did," stuttered Alan, "at least—not a ghost; only part of one!" he added unhelpfully.

Ada eyed him exasperatedly. "What d'you mean—a *part* of one! You either see a ghost, or you don't! Anyway, there aren't any such things as ghosts, so how you could see part of nothing, beats me!"

Alan rose from his seat at the table and retreated to the scullery, his face the color of green cheese. He opened the door, and left it slightly ajar. His wife watched his maneuvers in silence for a moment, then she spoke.

"Seems to me you'd better not have Welsh rarebit again, if that's how it affects you." She followed him into the scullery and sniffed suspiciously. "Hmph! You haven't been drinking. You know better

**Heading by Joseph R. Eberle**

than to attempt that sort of thing after all these years, Alan Morton! Then what's been ailing you?"

An expression of puzzlement flitted across her features as she reentered the dining room and commenced to clear the table. A clatter of crockery mingled with the lesser tinkle of knives and forks ensued as Mrs. Morton piled them on the trolley.

Then there was a hiatus—a gap of complete silence in the medley of domestic sounds, followed by a loud female scream. Alan gave a longing glance at the half-open door, as though meditating flight; but, surprisingly, moved to his wife's assistance instead. Only to be swept back to the scullery on the tide of his spouse's frenzied retreat. The narrow exit to the garden creaked as it protested against the sudden intrusion of two bodies into a space intended for the passage of only one at a time.

THE Mortons warily approached the threshhold of their dining room and looked in. The cool night air had made even a haunted dining room appear desirable by contrast; and besides, fancy being frightened by a—

"You're sure it was a dog's *ear* you saw?" whispered Ada.

"Absolutely certain! Besides, it waggled at me," returned her husband.

"*I* saw *two*—both waggling!" said Ada, a trifle proudly, as though it gave her precedence in the social scale of ear-waggers.

Alan considered the point gravely.

"At least, it proves there was something there to see! Well, it's gone now—"

His gaze wandered across the room. "What's that package in the corner?"

"Oh, *that!*" said Ada, her fears temporarily allayed by the distraction. "It came by parcel post this morning. I opened it in case it might be something important. It looks like part of a broken statue to me. There's a letter, which I haven't had time to read yet—"

Alan took a cursory glance at the curious object, and then looked at the correspondence.

"From Uncle Robert, I see!" He read the letter through in silence. "He's been digging ruins in Denmark, of all places!"

Uncle Robert was an archaeologist by profession. A man of private means, he spent much of his time pottering around in any old ruins he could find. Every now and then he remembered the existence of his nephew, and celebrated the fact by sending odds and ends of packages containing the most diverse material.

Ada lifted the curio on to the table with some difficulty and examined it intently. It seemed to be made of polished black marble, was about two feet in height, and rather heavy. It was mounted on a flat stone base.

"I wonder what it represents?" she murmured.

Alan looked up from the letter in his hand.

"Uncle says here that it is the remnant of a statue which he recovered from some ruins just outside Odense, which is a few miles from Copenhagen. At one time there was a temple erected on a site overlooking the river of that name—I suppose he means Odensa—but he learned from ancient Danish records that there had been a number of floods in the early part of the nineteenth century which had caused the river to overflow its banks and demolish the buildings almost entirely. Later excavation disclosed the fact that beneath this temple had been a large crypt of unusual design, divided into three rooms or caverns of moderate size. The floor was sandy, and had apparently at one time been part of a sea or river bed. No attempt had been made to lay a permanent flooring."

"Yes. But why *did* Uncle Robert send this to us?" said Ada impatiently, indicating the statue.

Alan referred to the letter again. "He says that the building had been known as the Temple of Canes, and had been used as a place of worship by an obscure sect of Dog Worshippers, who removed elsewhere when their shrine had been demolished, leaving naught behind but this." He indicated the package in the corner.

"He goes on to say that according to the ancient document he has inspected, there

was a legend extant at one time which said that the crypt had contained vast amounts of treasure, and that this had been guarded by three enormous dogs, which had been created magically for just that purpose. He says also that the decamping Sect of Canes must have taken all the treasures with them, because not a sou could he find to help pay for his excavation expenses."

Alan paused, his brow wrinkled in thought. "That bit about the three dogs seems to strike a chord of memory somewhere, though I can't quite bring anything to mind at the moment."

He inspected the letter again.

"There's a postscript! It says that according to the legend, anyone who could get past the Guardian Dogs and touch this statue would be very lucky, and so, as he thinks we can do with some of that commodity he has sent it to us."

"The old miser!" commented Ada vindictively. "If he feels so sorry for us it wouldn't have hurt him to send a check instead."

ALAN studied the curious monstrosity thoughtfully. The crumbling mass resembled the lower portion of an erect animal-like form whose *three* paws or claws were firmly implanted on the stone base. Around the body were interlaced long serpent-like tubes or tails, whose extremities reached down as far as the pedestal. What sort of a head the statue had possessed at one time Alan could hardly conjecture from the evidence of the torso. Certainly no animal alive in the world today.

"Perhaps it was a dog?" speculated Ada, helpfully.

"Have *you* ever seen an upright dog with three legs?" gibed Alan.

"Well . . . no . . ." admitted his wife, "but it might have lost one, same as it lost its head!"

Alan shook his head. "I don't agree. *This* part of the statue is perfect, as you can see. There is no place where another leg could have been broken off."

He grinned at his wife. "Anyway, there's no reason why we shouldn't comply with the conditions laid down, and touch it—for luck!"

He approached the statue, and prodded it in the ribs, ungently.

"Ouch!"

Alan looked at Ada enquiringly. "What was that?"

His wife looked puzzled. "Sounded to me like—like a distant howl! Perhaps a dog in the street—"

"Sounded nearer than that to me!" commented Alan, doubtfully. "Maybe it was the statue!"

"Don't be silly," said Ada, "how can a lifeless piece of stone feel?"

She approached a hand to its base. "Let's tickle its feet," she said playfully, and suited the action to the word.

The result was alarming. "Hey—stop that!" growled a gruff voice.

"Aye indeed!" snapped another.

"Wot's the gime!" said a third.

Alan backed to the windowsill, which he clutched fearfully with both hands. Ada executed a strategic retreat to the open kitchen door.

"Wha—what—who spoke?" said Alan, his eyes darting hither and thither about the room.

"I—we did!" said a gruff voice, proceeding from somewhere near the ceiling.

"Wh-where are you?" Alan demanded. "You—you've no right to frighten us like that. Besides—" as a measure of self-confidence returned—"this is private property! Leave this house at once!"

"Dinna fash yersel'—we're not in your house—yet!" replied "Snappy." "Leastways, only our voices—"

"An' part of our ears!" interjected another voice. "Mine got stuck, and I can't get it back!"

"Oh, *you're* always in trouble!" commented Gruff a trifle tartly. "Dogsbody here wouldn't have been aware of our presence if you hadn't advertised yourself all over the place!"

"Well! 'Ow did I know 'e was goin' to look up just at that moment?" said Stuck Ear, rather plaintively.

Alan had been putting two and two together.

"Are you referring to me as 'Dogsbody'?" he said.

"Och, yes," said Snappy impatiently. "We heard you called just that by the man next door! Now I've got my eye through I see we were mistaken." Two bloodshot eyes had appeared over the table.

Alan made his way to the settee and sat down. His hand searched nervily for a cigarette. "Ada," he called, "come along in! We've got some—er—visitors!"

Ada seated herself beside him, gazing as if she couldn't believe her eyes at several long ears, three eyes, and half a muzzle which protruded from blank space a yard above the package in the corner.

"Now—" said Alan, lighting his cigarette, "do you mind telling us exactly who you are, and what you are doing in my house?"

"Not at all!" replied Gruff. "We're Cerberus!"

"You're *what?*" Alan queried, puzzledly.

"Ye heard!" said Snappy. "We're Cerberus, the three-headed dog. Only we've lost our heads!"

"Cerebros?" interjected Ada, "but surely, that's some sort of salt—"

"Nah, nah!" said Stuck Ear, waggling that appendage frantically—"we're Cerberus, the dog wot used ter guard the gates of 'Ades—'Ell to you."

"Don't confuse the lady," said Gruff. "Let *me* explain, and you two shut up." The moist black muzzle turned towards Ada.

"You see, Madam, we're—kind of—attached to that thing on the table. Wherever it goes, *we* have to go too!"

"I've heard about you," interrupted Alan suddenly, "surely there was something in Greek or Roman legends about a fierce dog with three heads, and snakes intertwined round its body, which was charmed to sleep by Orpheus."

"Hhuh!" said Gruff voice. "Charmed, did you say? We were bored stiff! If you'd had to listen to that fellow playing his lyre for hours on end, you'd have gone to sleep too. But we were always reasonable, on occasion, you know. I remember when Aeneas gave us meat and cakes. Came in very handy, that did—" The jaws champed reminiscently. "Pluto (our boss, you know) was rather tight on the rations, and a little under the counter work was very acceptable at times. But we overdid it at last, and Pluto had us transferred to another Department. Black markets weren't due for thousands of years, he said, and Hades hadn't sunk as low as that yet."

"T'was a good job while it lasted," interjected Stuck Ear, who had by now succeeded in introducing a black and white snout in addition to his aural appendage. "Cripes, the drachmas we used to make on the side by selling bones to the Grecian soap factories. That's 'ow Greece got its name—" he added reflectively. "You understand, of course, that as the guardian, we were just outside the Gate of Hades, Hades proper was elsewhere—"

"Where did you get the bones?" asked Ada, her tone suggesting that she knew the answer, yet seeking confirmation of her worst fears, in the manner of a person who runs a tongue over a decayed tooth to see if it still aches.

"From the corpses, of course!" supplied Snappy. "We only let the ghosts of humans through to Hades, and their bodies were always reckoned to be our personal perquisites."

ALAN gave a shudder. "Quite up to date, aren't you?" he observed. "If you belong to Denmark now, how comes it you all speak English?"

"Well, we're English dogs, ain't we?" said Stuck Ear. "It don't matter nuffin *where* we are. If *you* was in China, would you, as an Englishman, be expected to talk Chinese? Nah, of course not. Now we English dogs—"

"British!" snarled Snappy at his colleague. "As a Scottish collie I resent that remark!"

"Come, come!" said Gruff, "We cannot allow national pride to affect our unity. I'm a bull-dog, and the third of our trio is a fox-terrier, and *we* don't quarrel—"

"No! Ye're both English!" retorted Snappy aggrievedly. "Just because of that ye think ye rule the kennel—but ye don't, ye ken!"

"When you've finished the family argu-

ment—" interrupted Alan suavely, "perhaps you will be good enough to attend to the question at issue, which is—what do you want with us?"

"Och aye," said Snappy, "we've tould ye—wherever that statue goes—so hae we to go."

"But what is the *purpose* of the statue—is it an idol, an oracle, or what?"

"Ye've said it, laddie," replied Snappy, "we're an oracle! Or rather, we *were*, until the idol's heads were knocked off. Now we're like a radio without a loudspeaker, unless there happens to be someone present—like your missus there, ye ken—from whom we can draw sufficient life essence to show ourselves and speak."

ALAN thought quickly. So these doggish intruders could only manifest if his wife were present. That was useful to know. It provided a helpful means of defence if his unwanted guests became obstreperous. Moreover, if they were in fact attached in some obscure way to the idol, surely he could, by disposing of *that*, rid himself of an encumbrance which might be undesirable. On second thought, however, there had been a hint of certain treasure, and he and Ada could do with a share if there was any going spare.

His silent speculations were interrupted by Gruff. "I should warn you," he said, "that your thoughts are not exactly a closed book to us. We are certainly compelled by the natural laws of association to remain in the vicinity of our idol; but now that we have linked up with the power-house that is your wife, she also must remain with us, until we see fit to let her go. If you should attempt to destroy the idol, or send your wife away, you will be responsible for an unfortunate accident."

An icy hand seemed to grip Alan by the throat. He shuddered. So these ghostly dogs were not so friendly as they had seemed.

"Our friendship depends on the degree of cooperation ye're willing to give, ye ken," said Snappy. "Now wull ye listen to me? While we were held to the confines of the temple at Odensa, we had no means of providing our idol with new heads. Naebody came near us with sufficient life force to enable us to show ourselves; but now that we have arrived in a cee-vilised community, ye ken—"

"But that's ridiculous," interrupted Alan crossly. "What do you expect *us* to do about it?"

"Have patience, mon," went on Snappy, "and I will tell ye. Now, that man next door is an amateur sculptor—"

"How d'you know that?" said Ada, quickly.

"We've had a look!" retorted Snappy. "Hoots mon! He outdoes Epstein, I tell ye. But we're not particular, as long as he can make new heads for us. A suggestion has just been implanted in his mind that he should call here. He will arrive in a moment or so. When he does, ye will be well advised to explain the situation. Meanwhile we will disappear from sight for the time being—but have no fear, we'll be back."

"COME on in, Tom," invited Alan, "what brings you away from your fireside this time o'night?"

Tom looked bewildered. "I don't rightly know," he said, "an' that's a fac'. The thought entered my mind that I was wanted here, and almost before I knew what I was doing I found myself on your doorstep, an' the knocker in me hand!"

Ada looked at her husband apprehensively. "Looks as though what they said was right!"

Alan gave a wry laugh at Tom's obvious puzzlement. "We have—had . . . visitors a short while ago," he explained.

"Oh!" replied Tom. "Anyone I know?"

"Hardly. Unless you've heard of Cerberus?"

Tom wrinkled his brow. "Cerberus—who's he when he's at home?"

Alan motioned his neighbor to an armchair.

"He's . . . are . . . three dogs!"

"Huh?" Tom looked at his friend sharply, trying to detect signs of a practical joke.

"Three dogs, you say?" He looked from Ada to Alan uncertainly. "You mean—

this 'ere Cerberus fellow brought three dogs with him?"

Alan explained the situation at some length, while Tom's eyes grew round with astonishment and a certain amount of disbelief, despite Ada's insistent and confirmatory remarks.

Finally Alan said, "Well, we've done our best to explain, Tom. This—Cerberus . . . wants you to sculp three dogs' heads for this idol, and that's all there is to it!"

"B-but I still don't understand? Are you sure you're not pulling my leg?" muttered the astounded Tom. "Anyhow, 'ow can I make a cast of three dogs' 'eads I hain't seen without models?"

"*We* will provide those," said Gruff.

"They're here again!" quavered Ada, pointing to the corner of the room."

"We've never left," retorted Stuck Ear, twitching that organ spasmodically.

" 'Pon my soul," said Tom, mopping his brow with a large handkerchief. "It's true, then! You ain't been kidding me, after all."

"KEEP still!" growled Tom, busy with frame and plaster. " 'Ow can I make a cast if you *will* keep wriggling about?"

"Sorry." Snappy cocked a bright eye in the direction of the other casts, already hardening. Ye've made a guid job of those, I must say. Weel done! But ye had better fairget those ideas ye have of strangling me while I'm in your power as ye think. Ye canna do it, ye ken. All I need do is dematerialize, an' where *are* ye?"

"Where are *you*, you mean!" said Alan, watching the workings of his friend's nimble fingers."

"Nowhere where ye can follow—yet!" replied Snappy. "This artist's model business is hungry wurrk. Where've those bones got to?"

Ada pointed to a mat by the scullery door.

"Och aye! I'll call t' others!"

Within a moment or so the human onlookers were regaled with the rare spectacle of three disembodied dogs' heads gnawing busily at a large plateful of bones, while a

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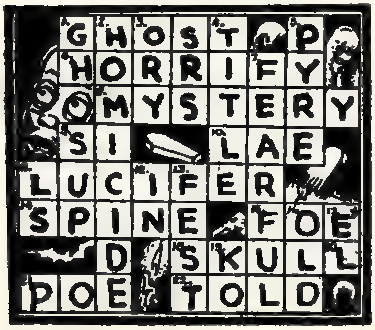


*(L)ovecraft.

foot or so behind, three stubby tails wagged in discrete harmony.

"What the butcher thinks of these large orders for bones, I *don't* know!" said Ada disconsolately. "He must think we run a vet's business!"

"Never mind about him," said Gruff, licking his chops reminiscently, and taking up a position in mid-air two feet above their heads. "Still, I must say, those bones are very welcome after all these years. Must be nearly a hundred years ago since Hans Andersen gave us a similar offering."

"Hans Andersen?" queried Alan quickly, "What's *he* got to do with it?"

As he asked the question, scenes from his childhood flashed across the screen of his memory. He saw himself reading a redbacked volume entitled "Andersen's Fairy Stories." How beloved they had been to his childish mind. He remembered some of his favorite titles. There was "The Snow Queen," "Great Clause and Little Clause," "The Wild Swans," "The Tinder Box," "Ole Luckie, the Dustman" . . . oh, dozens of them. By Jimini, if only he could get hold of a copy, he'd enjoy reading them now. . . .

He was recalled to the present by a cynical chuckle from Snappy. "Reet under your nose, an' ye canna see the connection? But perhaps ye will when I tell ye that Andersen was born at Odense?"

Alan thought quickly. "You mean—he had something to do with the temple of Canes—he was a member—?"

"Nae, mon—not a member! The temple was demolished lang before his time—"

"Then how—" Alan broke off short, and snapped his fingers. "I have it! The tale of the witch's Tinder Box and the three dogs; one with eyes as big as saucers, one with eyes as big as mill-wheels, and the third—"

"Bravo, cocky—you've got it!" Stuck Ear had managed at last to make a facial appearance at the side of Gruff, and his alert, intelligent expression contrasted favorably with the more forbidding countenance of the bull-dog. "Those were us, d'ye see? Hans stumbled on the temple ruins by accident, just like your uncle did; an' 'e gave us lashings of bones in exchange for the story which 'as brought 'im fame an' fortune, so to speak."

"There *were* other stories too, don't forget—" said Alan mildly.

"Yus! Well, I s'pose so. But look where 'e put our title—right at the front of 'is collection! Mind you, 'e *did* exaggerate somewot—about the size of our eyes f'rinstance; but in the main 'e wos accurate enough."

"You dogs are the limit!" grumbled Ada, sweeping up an assorted collection of gnawed bones. "You're worse than cats! Why can't you keep your bones on the mat, instead of dragging them halfway across the scullery?"

"Hoots, wooman! Hae *ye* ever tried to

eat a meal wi'oot hands?" admonished Snappy. "Maybe ye wouldn't find it so easy."

"I'll be off now," said Tom, who had finished washing his hands in the sink. "Tomorrow should see the finish of the job, and then—"

"Then all your troubles will be over," said Snappy.

ALAN confronted his unwanted guests as the dogs' heads hung in a row above his mantelpiece, like living trophies of the chase. "Tom will be along presently with the completed models. But see here, Ada and I have been thinking over your story. You told us yesterday about Hans Andersen, and it simply doesn't hold water!"

"And why not, my guid mon?" said Snappy.

Alan nearly choked. "I'm not your good man!" He raised his fist. "For two pins. . . ."

Three menacing jaws snarled in unison. "I shouldn't if I were you," said Gruff. "Remember what we told you about your wife. Her fate is bound up with ours. If you strike *us*, you also strike her, and you don't look like a man who beats his wife. *But*—" Gruff barked to emphasize his "if you collaborate with us, you will get what you most desire *when* the oracle is completed."

"We've only got your word for it," said Ada, "and you have made a lot of conflicting statements. For example, you said at first that you were Cerberus, the three-headed dog of Hades. Now it turns out that you were *three* dogs in some temple at Odense." She snorted indignantly. "Next, I suppose, you will be half-a-dozen racing greyhounds!"

The three dogs' heads looked puzzled.

"We get around, sairtainly," said Snappy uncertainly, "But as for your remairks—we tould ye some time since that Pluto had us transferred from the Gate of Hades to anither department. Ye ken—Hades was not situated in Greece, as many believe, but was—and is—located in the Canary Islands, in the North Atlantic. D'ye get me? The

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real name of the Islands is 'Canaria' or the home of 'Dogs of Great Size.' Us—and our progeny—in fact."

STUCK EAR took up the tale. "S'right! An' Pluto—'e ups and transfers us to Odense for our sins. 'Watch-dog!' 'e ses, 'I've seen yer grow! I'll teach yer to give this 'ere Island a bad name! I'll separate you three-in-one, an' make yer one-and-three.' And lumme, 'e wos as good as 'is word. He no sooner sed it, than Hey Presto, there we wos, nearly two thousand years in the future, wiv three large stone bodies, one in each of three caverns; and in the inner court was a black marble model of our original self, with three 'eads."

Stuck Ear panted dog-fashion, his great red tongue protruding from his open jaws.

"And that is how we came to be at Odense," said Gruff. "Very soon a sect of your rather stupid humans turned us into an oracle and built a temple round us. Pluto had caused the idol in the inner chamber to be our only means of expression, and multitudes used to gather and listen to our words of wisdom. Yes—and pick up a bit on the side, too. Because, in front of the Cerberus idol was a pile of treasure which never lessened, no matter how much was taken from it. There were conditions, of course."

Ada and Alan were beginning to feel excited. All this talk of never-ending treasure had something to do with that damaged idol in the corner of their room, they were sure. Half repressed emotions of greed and cupidity showed in their eyes as they glanced once more at their visitors.

"Then—" suggested Alan, eagerly, "if that idol is repaired, the treasure will return—"

"Undoubtedly," confirmed Gruff, "whatever the heart desires, that treasure will be in abundance at the foot of the oracle, which will, at the same time, dispense words of—"

"We're not interested in those!" interrupted Alan rudely. "Hello, there goes the knocker. That must be Tom. Hope he's got those heads ready. 'Spect he'll want a share in the proceeds. Must draw up some sort

of an agreement, anyway. He can't expect to receive a full third share, especially as it's *our* house. . . ."

"THERE!" said Tom proudly, as he scraped off the last loose piece of putty. "A real artistic job, if I 'as to say it meself!" He rubbed his hands on a dirty apron. "My Sybil is greatly puzzled! Can't make out at all what I've been a-doing of. I told her she had better come on in and see for herself if she's so curious. I've left the front door slightly ajar—"

"Weel—" said Snappy, "that *does* begin to look more like our ould hame!" His eyes gleamed redly in the electric light.

"'E ain't arf proud o' hisself," commented Stuck Ear, winking at Alan, "betcher 'e'd like to live there, and work the oracle—"

"What about the treasure—?" began Alan, and bit his lip.

"Treasure?" said Tom, quickly. "*What* treasure?"

"He means," said Gruff, "that when the idol is inhabited once again, treasure of the kind most desired by the humans present will appear in quantities which cannot grow less, no matter how much is taken. There are conditions, of course—"

"You said that once before—" interjected Alan, "what *are* those conditions?"

"There are twa," said Snappy, resting his snout on the mantelpiece. "The first is simple—that the intending—ah—bene*e*-ficiaries should not ask beforehand what the second condition is—"

"But that is unreasonable," said Ada fearfully, "surely we should know what *all* the requirements are before—"

"Oh, shut *up!*" interrupted Alan, rudely. "What does it matter as long as we get the treasure? If we have unlimited money we can buy anything necessary. They will probably want a temple or something, and even worshippers. We can hire—"

"Where do *I* come in with all this money?" said Tom aggrievedly. "After all, *I* made the heads, and supplied the material—"

"And whose *house* is this?" demanded Ada. "We hired you to do a job—"


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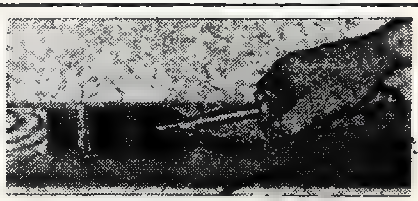

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"Oh, *you* did!" commented Tom. His lips pursed thinly together. "Let me tell *you,* I want a third share in whatever's coming, or else I smash these 'eads." He lifted a trowel threateningly.

"There's no need to do that," interposed Gruff. "*We* will see that you get your fair share. And now, to work the oracle—"

SYBIL NICHOLLS pushed open her neighbor's gate, and walked up the garden path. Her woman's curiosity had been aroused by her husband's apparently senseless descriptions, and she had decided to take advantage of his earlier suggestion that she should look in and see for herself what was going on.

She knocked once, and then remembered that Tom had said he would leave the door ajar. She pushed it open, and stood listening. A light streamed from beneath a door facing her, but she could hear no voices. Instead, she became aware of a curious snuffling noise.

Mrs. Nicholls closed the street door behind her, and approached the room. She tapped gently, and turned the handle. At the scene before her she gasped with amazement.

On their hands and knees, in front of an ugly black idol with three dogs' heads, crouched the forms of Ada and Alan Morton, and her own husband Tom. On the carpet beneath them was the largest assortment of meat bones of all sorts which Sybil had ever seen. A fleshy aroma filled the air. All three forms were munching and gnawing away contentedly at the feast before them. Which feast constituted treasure they could most desire.

Tom's form cocked a jaundiced eye at Sybil's entrance. The eye was reddish, and wary. It held no recognition of her. "Who's this woman?" he demanded, gruffly.

Ada sat up on her haunches. She snarled. "Och, aye, it's t'lady from next door. Get awa' wi' ye!"

And as Alan moved towards her on all fours, barking and biting at her heels, Sybil turned and ran screaming, into the night!

# The Eyrie

(*Continued from page 6*)

about stories, we find. Derleth writes that he has a Cthulthu yarn in the making.—EDITOR, WEIRD TALES

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

*Congratulations on the best cover you've had in a long time. I could hardly believe my eyes when I picked up the July* WEIRD *in a friend's home. I thought he must have dragged out a 10 or 15-year-old issue from his files so different was it from the general run of* WEIRD *covers. As for the story it illustrated with the impressive name of Asimov, someone should tell him he can't write humor.*

*Would you mind telling me why to be weird a story must be a ghost story, or a tale of a similar spectral manifestation? Practically all your stories fall in this category though the weirdest thing is invariably the common-everyday suddenly distorted out of shape. Harold Lawlor's "Unknown Lady" had this quality despite the ever-present ghost and was thus the weirdest, and best, story in your issue in my opinion.*

*Anyway, you have a far better magazine than you were issuing five years ago.*

*Vernon L. McCain,*
*Nampa, Idaho*

We are glad the readers liked Bill Wayne's cover, quite a few of you wrote to say so. Speaking about the story "Legal Rites," we are most apologetic in that we spelled the name of Mr. Asimov's co-author as "MacCreagh," instead of MacCreigh as it should have been. It shouldn't have been possible for a Mac to get such treatment in this office—but it happened. EDITOR, WEIRD TALES.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

*Artist Bill Wayne's cover on September* WEIRD TALES *epitomizes what is and what the readers are like. In the latter instance,*


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*the calm, quiet and studious attitude of the Lawyer reflects the typical reader's attitude of curiosity about the unknown. The "unknown" is standardized in the form of the ghost of "Old Hank" sitting in the cozy library.*

*Best story this time to me, is "The Mirror" by Mildred Johnson. I was reading this alone in the country while sunbathing, and had just got to the place where Richard saw his uncle in the mirror when a friend of mine slipped up on me and added immeasurably to my fright by suddenly appearing on the scene. Napoli's heading for the story was swell. He captured the abysmal horror of the final paragraphs.*

*Frank Owen's "Three Pools and A Painted Moon" is second. There is one phrase (on page 80) which is exactly the kind of scene in old China that I have pictured now and then since I was a small child. It seems to lend credence to the idea of re-incarnation. I quote it: "a morning at sunrise when the dew was heavy on the cool grass and the last vestige of moonlight still lingered in the tall bamboo."*

*Third best was "The Shadow from the Steeple" by Bloch. Mostly good for resurrecting the Lovecraft mythology. I also liked "Legal Rites," "The Pineys," "The Spanish Camera." I wish Wellman would really bring back the Thunstone versus the Shonokins theme.*

*I think you should change the headings of the Eyrie, the club page, and the contents page.*

*Bob Barnett,*
*1107 Lyon,*
*Carthage, Mo.*

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

*I would like to express my heartfelt enthusiasm for your wonderful choice in selecting Mr. Wayne's cover for your September issue of WT. On the whole, I would appreciate it if you could specialize in forms of stories according to what your title,* WEIRD TALES, *suggests. You're doing a remarkably fine job as things stand, but there are many other fine people like myself who cannot absorb enough of the horror-*

*type stories primarily owing to the fact that it has become such a neglected field. So, by all means, try and publish them as often as you can—stories that can really make a man wish to turn his head in a dark room and look into closets; namely, tales that can have the propensity of taking one's breath away or chilling the very marrow in his bones.*

*Calvin Thos. Beck,*
*North Bergen, N. J.*

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

*Yes, I guess I can say that your mag is improving. But come now, there's still a long way to go.*

*D. Mitchell,*
*Winnipeg, Manitoba*

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

*I would like to register my enthusiastic approval of Arthur J. Burks' novelette, "Shallajai," which appeared in the July issue. This story represents a reaffirmation of faith in the ultimate victory of mankind and of belief in guidance from above, which is my creed. It certainly is a good omen in today's troubled world.*

*Bravos also go to Isaac Asimov and James MacCreigh for their yarn, "Legal Rites" in the September issue—a very readable story with a surprise ending that really was a surprise. Let's have more like this.*

*Arthur Stein,*
*Bronx, N. Y.*

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

*I got issues of WT what go so far back, they was the inspiration to Sinbad the Sailor. So I'm as much a fan as everybody, but I blew my top when I read what the lady from Colton, California, wrote about horror stories! Ain't we got enough grief reading in the papers about what the Atomic and Hydrogen bomb is maybe gonna do to our lives, without we pay our few cents for reading enjoyment and get the same thing? Only maybe worse?*

*Jerry Gladstone,*
*358 W. 46th St., New York, N. Y.*

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*WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT*

# HAIR LOSS

## *ITCHY SCALP, DANDRUFF, HEAD SCALES, SEBORRHEA, EXCESSIVE FALLING HAIR*

The following facts are brought to the attention of the public because of a widespread belief that nothing can be done about hair loss. This belief has no basis in medical fact. Worse, it has condemned many men and women to needless baldness by their neglect to treat certain accepted causes of hair loss.

There are six principal types of hair loss, or *alopecia*, as it is known in medical terms:

1. Alopecia from diseases of the scalp
2. Alopecia from other diseases or from an improper functioning of the body
3. Alopecia of the aged (senile baldness)
4. Alopecia areata (loss of hair in patches)
5. Alopecia of the young (premature baldness)
6. Alopecia at birth (congenital baldness)

Senile, premature and congenital alopecia cannot be helped by anything now known to modern science. Alopecia from improper functioning of the body requires the advice and treatment of your family physician.

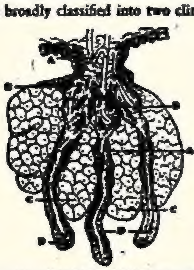
***BUT MANY MEDICAL AUTHORITIES NOW BELIEVE A SPECIFIC SCALP DISEASE IS THE MOST COMMON CAUSE OF HAIR LOSS.***

This disease is called Seborrhea and can be broadly classified into two clinical forms with the following symptoms:

1. *DRY SEBORRHEA:* The hair is dry, lifeless, and without gloss. A dry flaky dandruff is usually present with accompanying itchiness. Hair loss is considerable and increases with the progress of this disease.

2. *OILY SEBORRHEA:* The hair and scalp are oily and greasy. The hair is slightly sticky to the touch and has a tendency to mat together. Dandruff takes the form of head scales. Scalp is usually itchy. Hair loss is severe with baldness as the end result.

Many doctors agree that to NEGLECT these symptoms of DRY and OILY SEBORRHEA is to INVITE BALDNESS.




**DESTRUCTION OF HAIR FOLLICLES**
***Caused By Seborrhea***

A — Dead hairs; B — Hair-destroying bacteria; C — Hypertrophied sebaceous glands; D — Atrophic follicles.

Seborrhea is believed to be caused by three germ organisms — staphylococcus albus, pityrosporum ovale, and acnes bacillus.

These germs attack the sebaceous gland causing an abnormal working of this fat gland. The hair follicle, completely surrounded by the enlarged diseased sebaceous gland, then begins to atrophy. The hair produced becomes smaller and smaller until the hair follicle dies. Baldness is the inevitable result. (See illustration.)

But seborrhea can be controlled, particularly in its early stages. The three germ organisms believed to cause seborrhea, can and should be eliminated before they destroy your normal hair growth.

A post-war development, Comate Medicinal Formula kills these three germ organisms on contact. Proof of Comate's germ-killing properties has been demonstrated in laboratory tests recently conducted by one of the leading testing laboratories in America. (Complete report on file and copies are available on request.)

When used as directed, Comate Medicinal Formula controls seborrhea—stimulates the flow of blood to the scalp—helps stop scalp itch and burn—improves the appearance of your hair and scalp—helps STOP HAIR LOSS due to seborrhea. Your hair looks more attractive and alive.

**You may safely follow the example of thousands who first were skeptical, then curious, and finally decided to avail themselves of Comate Medicinal Formula.**

**A Few of the Many Grateful Expressions By Users of Comate Medicinal Formula**

"My hair was coming out for years and I tried everything. Nothing stopped it until I tried Comate. Now my hair has stopped coming out. It looks so much thicker. My friends have noticed my hair and they all say it looks so much better." —Mrs. R.E.J., Stevenson, Ala.

"Your hair formula got rid of my dandruff; my head does not itch any more. I think it is the best of all of the formulas I have used."—E.E., Hamilton, Ohio.

"Your formula is everything you claim it to be and the first 10 days trial freed me of a very bad case of dry seborrhea." —J.E.M., Long Beach, Calif.

"I do want to say that just within few days I have obtained a great improvement in my hair. I do want to thank you and the Comate Laboratories for producing such a wonderful and amazing formula."—M.M., Johnstown, Pa.

"I have found almost instant relief. My itching has stopped with one application."—J.N., Stockton, Calif.

"My hair looks thicker, not falling out like it used to. Will not be without Comate in the house."—R.W., Lonsdale, R. I.

"I haven't had any trouble with dandruff since I started using Comate."—L.W.W., Galveston, Tex.

"This formula is everything if not more than you say it is. I am very happy with what it's doing for my hair." —T.J., Las Cruces, New Mexico

"I find it stops the itch and retards the hair fall. I am thankful for the help it has given me in regard to the terrible itchiness."—R.B.L., Philadelphia, Pa.

"The bottle of Comate I got from you has done my hair so much good. My hair has been coming out and breaking off for about 21 years. It has improved so much." —Mrs. J.E., Lisbon, Ga.

Today these benefits are available to you just as they were to these sincere men and women when they first read about Comate. If your hair is thinning, over-dry or over-oily—if you are troubled with dandruff with increasing hair loss—you may well be guided by the laboratory tests and the experience of thousands of grateful men and women.

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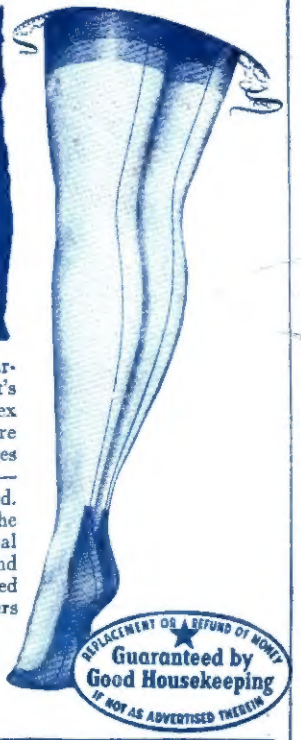


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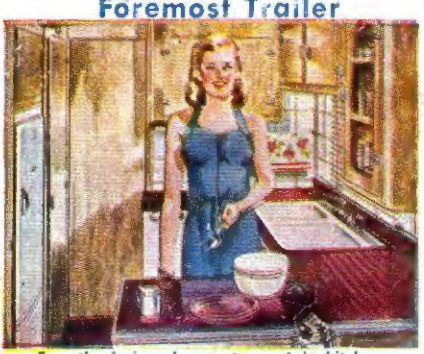

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